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THE QUEEN'S HOUSE.

A Narrative.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE QUEEN'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

"THAT'S ALISON."

THERE had been a wedding at John Harbuckle's house on Tower Hill. Jessie Bayliss and Malcolm Carruthers, after a romantic course of much-tried true love, that had run most cruelly rough, had at last been married in the beautiful old church of St. Olave's, Hart Street, close by. They had been married just two days. To those they had left behind them those two days had seemed very long—in fact, quite endless; especially so to Alison, Jessie's cousin, who could not at all under-

stand life without the presence of Jessie. What a thing it is to have a very beautiful girl in the house! When she is gone, what remains? To Alison during those two long days *nothing*—only the blank space where Jessie had been. Alison could not settle down to the business of her ordinary life; indeed, it was as if she had no business—Alison who, for the last few weeks, had been racing hither and thither, and stitching and packing, and scribbling notes at so amazing a rate.

It was all over; Jessie was married and had gone. The roses that had been so fresh and fragrant on the bridal day were limp now, and their petals were already beginning to fall; the last packet of wedding cake had been sent off; everything was done—finished. Jessie, the companion of her young life, had gone; and Alison, who had hitherto been quite content to dwell in Jessie's shadow, accepting with gratitude such small praises as her modesty allowed her to claim,

as one of "the girls," was left alone, the sole representative of that charming partnership.

With so lovely a girl as Jessie in the house, Alison, you may be sure, never had had much chance of thinking too highly of herself, as herself. This is one of the moral advantages of living with an acknowledged beauty; still, as one of "the girls," she had grown used to herself. Now that Jessie was gone, and there was no one to throw the familiar shadow over her, Alison did not know herself at all; she felt as strange as a little pale sapling might feel when the tree above it is cut down. It seemed to her that Alison must be almost as truly gone away as was Jessie; and all she could do was to wander, wander, wander, looking for Jessie, and for herself—for "the girls" that used to be, and never would be any more. But always, as she wandered, deep down in her heart she talked to herself about a

certain Alec, arguing, discussing, dreaming, and feeling ten thousand things that, after all, only made up the name of that Alec to whom she had been so cold on the wedding day. Was she repenting of her coldness? Why did he not come *then*? Why did he let those two whole, empty days drag by without a word from him? Had he come then—but he did not; that is all we know. What might have been had he come, who can say?

Strangely desolate and empty the wide City house was to Alison during those dreary days. It is true, there was her own mother in the dining-room, to whom she dared hardly speak, for fear she should ask her about Alec; there was Uncle John downstairs, in the distant office, the servants in the kitchen; but who were these to fill the house? "The girls" had fled; what is a house without girls?

Wandering aimlessly about her home, vaguely seeking she scarcely knew what

(it might, after all, have been Alec Carruthers), Alison presently entered the deserted drawing-room, which, poor thing, was looking thoroughly and sympathetically depressed; for Uncle John had that very morning carefully altered the disposition of the furniture, as one sometimes does after a funeral, and the room was not yet used to the change. Wandering aimlessly, I repeat, and scarcely seeing where she went, but with perhaps some vague intention of going to the window, to look if Alec were coming, Alison walked into the re-arranged room; and there, with a start as of a sudden awakening, and a thrill as of superstitious horror, she came face to face with Herself!

There she was complete; from the tip of her toe to the wreath of brown hair on her well-balanced little head—Herself! Was it a warning? Had she been Jessie, she would have run away, so eerie she

felt; but, being Alison and brave, she stayed and faced herself.

In the minutest fraction of a second she saw that Uncle John, in moving an ottoman, had left exposed the long panel of glass that occupied the space between the windows; but even before she could thus account for the apparition, she had remembered how several ladies of Holland House had met themselves before their deaths.

Was *she* going to die? Was Alec going to die? Had she done wrong in treating him so coldly on the wedding day? Why, then, had he tried to talk to her in a way in which she did not wish him to talk to her—at any rate, not then? He ought to have seen that he was annoying her; but he was so obtuse!

She looked steadily at the glass. She knew that full-length portrait was only a reflection; but the impression left on her mind was, she had seen herself, and some-

thing serious was going to happen. A solemn tone, like that one long-drawn, mysterious key-note that begins the weird Overture of *Der Freischütz*, reverberated through the deepest recesses of her being, as she stood with hushed breathing, gravely looking at her own image in the glass.

She had never before seen herself full length there. It was strange to her, that familiar form standing before her, still and motionless as in a picture.

"The girls are gone!" she said presently, after long silence and when the last faint echo of the warning key-note had died away; "the girls are gone. *That is a woman.*"

Without moving she continued to regard, with the deepest gravity, the reflection, and the new phase of her life it announced to her.

The blinds were drawn, for earlier in the day the sun had been shining full in

at the windows; the colours in the glass were consequently richer, if less vivid, than those of the object reflected.

Alison Bayliss was wearing a gown of darkest blue, on which were thrown small sprays of pale leaves. The close-fitting bodice and sleeves showed a figure on the whole good, but promising to be better when there should be less discrepancy between the slight waist and the well-developed shoulders.

"I am a singularly incongruous being!" said Alison, taking one step nearer the glass, as she noticed this and many other peculiarities. "My smooth little brown head, and my irregular features; my neat dress, my Puritanic collar and cuffs, my radical wildness and untidyness! How dim that portrait is, after such a radiant vision of loveliness as Jessie! And yet—and yet!"

Alison had, perhaps, as little feminine vanity as any young woman of twenty-three can have, and the constant presence

of a very pretty girl had done much to develop her humility; but for two whole days she had seen absolutely nothing in the shape of feminine beauty; so now, coming quite up to the glass, she said, with a not unfriendly scrutiny, "And yet!"

A sudden, half-humorous thought brightened her dark grey eyes (very nice eyes they were, too), and sharpened the corners of her lips; the image in the glass grew clearer and more life-like. "Was just not ugly, and was just not mad," she said, her features relaxing into a very decided and whimsical smile, as, quickly rummaging in that untidy receptacle of unassorted odds and ends—her memory, she fished out the quotation, and applied it to herself.

Just at that moment the door was gently opened, and her mother, Mrs. Bayliss, sailed in with a note in her hand, just in time to catch Alison in the very act of

bringing her face nearer the glass than she had ever seen her bring it before.

Was it possible, thought Mrs. Bayliss, that Alison could actually have been kissing her own reflection? At any rate, Mrs. Bayliss was pleased with what she saw. Alison's want of vanity had been a sore trial to her mother many a time and oft.

Alison laughed and blushed at being caught, and at once turning away from the panel, went to one of the windows, where she pushed back the sun-blinds, letting in the full light.

As she did so, she revealed a box of painted tiles, filled with geraniums and mignonette, in front of the window; beyond the bright flowers, the twinkling plane trees of Trinity Square Gardens; beyond the trees, on which a summer shower was falling, the Tower of London, the western walls just touched by the sun to a golden warmth the rain strove in vain to quench.

"Alison love, here is a note from the Queen's House," said Mrs. Bayliss. "What a pity we can't go there!"

Alison took the note her mother held towards her. "What a sweet little grey 'Tower of London, E.C.!'" she exclaimed, looking affectionately at a tiny picture of the great Norman keep, with its four turrets, its flag-staff and flag, all complete on the top of the sheet of note paper.

"They ask us to go over to-morrow afternoon, early," said Mrs. Bayliss. "It's unfortunate, isn't it, that we've promised to go down to Woolwich Common, to see the Gregsons?"

"Gregsons or no Gregsons," cried Alison, "I must go to the Queen's House! That little grey Tower is more than I can resist."

"But, my dear, we *must* go down to the Gregsons, because they've only just returned from India, and I wouldn't neglect an old friend of your dear father's upon any con-

sideration! You can go to the Tower any day."

"But not to have tea with my Princess at the Queen's House!"

"Do you really wish to go, Alison?"

"Mother, I've set my heart upon going! Think of the literary value of the thing. I can't afford to lose it," said Alison.

"Li—ter—ary value! Pooh!" returned Mrs. Bayliss, with an expression of the utmost contempt; not, however, quite unmixed with amusement.

"Ah, mother, it's all very well——" Alison stammered, and then broke down. Her mother had tapped a very sensitive nerve.

"It is so absurd of you to imagine that anything you write will ever have the slightest value!"

"Uncle John doesn't think so," put in Alison very humbly, but with heightened colour. "But, mother," trying to resume her usual tone, "why can't you go to

the Gregsons, and let me go over the way?"

"Well, I should rather like you to see the Gregsons to-morrow," said Mrs. Bayliss, in a voice that showed signs of a disposition to yield.

"And I hardly like the idea of trusting a young and inexperienced mother out alone, especially to Woolwich!" laughed Alison gaily.

She had a singularly pleasant and humorous laugh. Her mother, who perceived in Alison's light words an allusion to that event in Mrs. Bayliss's own career as a widow, known in her family circle as "The episode of Major Merriman," Major Merriman having, not so very long ago, tried hard to become Alison's step-father—Mrs. Bayliss, remembering this event, which had been a source of considerable gratification to her, laughed also, and said:—

"Well, darling, you go to your Tower,

and I'll go to my Woolwich. Will that suit you?"

"I don't like to let you go alone! I don't like my mother to be running about unprotected! An attractive mother is such a heavy responsibility!" said Alison with a mock sigh.

"Nonsense, nonsense, child! Go to the Queen's House. The matter's settled!"

"Settled"—ah, Mrs. Bayliss! Mrs. Bayliss! If you only knew what matter it was that you had settled so easily for your daughter! But if we knew whither our steps would lead, could we ever walk fearlessly anywhere?

As for Alison, she had at that moment no fear of any one or anything in the future, either near or distant, except that her mother might ask her why Alec had not called since the wedding. When she gaily turned to the writing-table to answer the note that was to change the whole current of her life, all she said to herself was:—

"I like the idea of tea at the Tower! 'The Tower of London, E.C.' I love the delightful incongruity of that distinctly modern addition, 'E.C.!' How shockingly unæsthetic of me, to be sure!"

* * * * *

The next was a typical June day; bright, breezy, not too hot.

All the morning long the plane trees in the gardens of Trinity Square, Tower Hill, made a pleasant murmurous sound, that even the heavy traffic to and from the huge bonded warehouses could not drown. Their leaves danced gaily in the sunshine; the grey of the Tower beyond them looked clear, almost white, with dryness; the quaint look-out on the top of the Bell Tower seemed hanging like a great bird-cage against a cloudless sky.

"I never saw the Tower look more enticing!" exclaimed Alison several times that fair morning.

There are still a few such days in the City of London.

On such a morning why did not Alec come? Did she expect him? Had any one asked she would have said: "Of course not! He is at Muirhead, three hundred miles away." Yet she went to the window every now and then.

He did not come; the fair morning slipped away, hour by hour, and brought not Alec, but what was to be.

Did she love him? It was still with her an open question; perhaps at any moment of that sweet morning, one word from him might have shown her how she really felt towards him. Alison had been her cousin Jessie's bridesmaid; Alec had been his cousin Mac's best man. The situation had been a trying one to Alison; to Alec it had been terrible; perhaps that was why he kept away.

After lunch Mrs. Bayliss was the first to start.

Alison helped her mother to get ready, went with her to Cannon Street Station, took her ticket for her, and then dutifully saw her to the barrier.

"Good-bye, mother!" she said lightly, as she gave her the ticket. "Take care of yourself!"

"I'll do my best, dear; you do the same!"

Alison nodded her head gaily several times, and so they parted.

"I should like to know a little more definitely how things stand between Alec and Alison," sighed Mrs. Bayliss on her way to Woolwich. "I believe they understand each other—I'm not sure; I didn't like the look of him on the wedding day; and Alison is such a strange girl; I dare not put it to her plainly, but I wish I knew! If I could be happy again without my own lost James, to see Alison the Lady of Muirhead would make me so! I should think there never was a girl so

blind to her own advantage as Alison; and yet, I sometimes fancy she really must care for him. I wish I knew; but even Jessie was not certain. Poor dear Alison, good as she is (and she only wants wings to be quite an angel), there's a touch of the rebel in her! That's a contradiction, perhaps; yes, but that's Alison!"

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAD GONE BEFORE.

As the earlier histories of Alison and Jessie have already been chronicled at length in "The Tower Gardens," a very few lines here will suffice to bring Alison's life up to the critical point at which it arrived two or three days after her cousin's wedding.

Alison Bayliss was the only child of the late Captain James Bayliss and his wife, Mary. She was born at the house of her maternal grandparents on Tower Hill, her father having left for India with his regiment a month or two before that interesting event. Her mother, therefore, never ceased reviling the City, and be-

wailing the fact that her daughter was a born cockney; it was her way of showing gratitude to her own parents for all the trouble she gave them.

As an infant Alison was taken out to India, to be sent back again as a little girl; afterwards, she was sometimes with her parents and sometimes without them, until, when she was about fourteen, her father, who hitherto had had scarcely anything but his pay to live upon, came into a small fortune, which appeared to him an opening that would lead him on to untold wealth.

After trying hard to ruin himself in literature and art, the idea of making money as a gentleman farmer took absolute possession of him. He left the Service, and pursued this phantom of his brain with as much ardour as if to die penniless were the height of his ambition. He *did* die penniless, and that very soon; but not before he had inspired his wife with the vehement

desire to sacrifice herself, her daughter, and her niece, Jessie, to the Scotch farm that had killed the husband she adored.

That Moloch of a farm would no doubt have eaten both Alison and her mother, as well as Jessie, up alive, had not the widow's brother, John Harbuckle, an old bachelor, who then lived by himself on Tower Hill, in the house that had been his father's, come gallantly to the rescue, saved the little freehold, and taken his sister, with her daughter and niece, back to London with him.

Alison had had a very bitter dose of penury by the banks of the swift-rushing Birren Water; but there had been one drop of sweetness to relieve it. This sweetness had been her cousin, Jessie, who had lightened all Alison's troubles by halving them with her.

Now, this Jessie was more than a very pretty girl, she was beautiful. Everybody in Birrendale knew that; but the one who

knew it best was a certain young man, who happened to be the cousin of Alec Carruthers of Muirhead. This young man's name was Mac; no one ever called him anything else.

Muirhead was a large estate, not many miles from the farm, and the Birren ran near both. Mac was young and merry and poor, so of course he fell in love with Jessie, who, as well as being lovely, was also merry and young, and in those hard times absolutely farthingless. Many sad and dreadful things happened, but Mac and Jessie were brave and lived through them. They were married now.

As for Alison's treatment of Jessie, and of the way she set her up as a household divinity, and worshipped her, are these not written in the loving chronicles of Jessie's heart—the heart, I mean, of Mrs. Malcolm Carruthers, otherwise "Mrs. Mac?" Far be it from me to speak of a just-wedded woman as "Jessie."

Now, as a match the Jessie-and-Mac wedding, highly interesting as it was from the romantic point of view, was really hardly worth mentioning. Poor old Mac was only the nephew of the Laird of Muirhead, with plenty of disadvantages. Yet Mrs. Bayliss approved and was pleased, especially as it enabled her to consider Mac's cousin as one of the family. And Mac's cousin, Alec Carruthers, was well known to be the most eligible *parti* in Birrendale; and Alison was, as Alec himself had told Mrs. Bayliss, "the only girl he had ever been able to talk to,"—an admission that meant a great deal from so shy a young man as young Carruthers of Muirhead.

"You must admit, my dear, that Alec has every advantage," Mrs. Bayliss had once said to her niece Jessie.

"Ah, auntie!" Jessie had replied, quite seriously for her. "And what can a man have worse?"

"I believe there was a good deal in that remark of Jessie's," said Mrs. Bayliss to herself as she went down to Woolwich. "How I should myself have hated a man with every advantage! Dearest James was always so unlucky!"

CHAPTER III.

"NEVER MORE."

As soon as Mrs. Bayliss was out of her sight, it struck Alison very forcibly that she was alone. Jessie had gone, Alec had gone, and now even her own mother had left her. She was perfectly used to taking care of herself; she liked, indeed, to feel independent of every one; still, she missed the others.

"I'll go and buy myself some roses," she said. "When Jessie was with us we never had to buy flowers, they came from Muirhead by the bushel. Mac sent them, of course."

She said "Mac;" she may have meant Alec.

She had very little money; she rarely had any to lavish on her own personal adornment. She worked in a Mission down in the wretched streets at the back of the Royal Mint, to which all her spare shillings—few enough at any time, and fewer still since the date of her cousin's wedding had been fixed—were devoted. What prompted her, then, that afternoon to buy two glowing roses of the deepest red at the little flower-shop on the station steps?

After she had bought them she went home through the busy, busy City, no one taking the slightest notice of her; or, if they did, she never saw it, so engrossed was she with her own thoughts, which, strange as it may appear, ran on that familiar theme of hers, the uninterestingness of young men.

"They bore me more than words of mine can express!" she said to herself, as she went through the crowded streets, in which hundreds of them were scuttering

about like bees in a hive. "It is not one of them only—but all—all I have ever met! They *are* so uninteresting! What can they inspire except utter, utter weariness? Imagine my having Alec Carruthers always on my hands; having to find him in amusement for ever! I couldn't do it, you know; I should break down. It isn't as if he could be packed off to the City at nine in the forenoon, and would not come home until six in the evening; one could perhaps bring one's mind to tolerate that; but to have him about the house all day long—to have to make conversation for him at lunch as well as at dinner—I should simply die of yawning! I used to think he was really fond of books, but he isn't. Poor dear Mac too, how tired I used to get of him when he would persist in coming every day! Jessie didn't get tired of him, though! Yes, but Jessie is one person and I am another—very much another. How strange I feel without her! I really don't

know myself at all! I wonder, now, shall I be able to dress myself without her? What extraordinary guy shall I make of myself now I am left entirely to my own evil devices?"

Alison was very happy, very careless—without a care, I mean. What Jessie used to call Alison's "happy-go-luckiness," was in full force, as she walked back from the station. She went home, changed her simple blue print for soft, neutral-tinted silk attire, in which she looked almost like a bright-eyed mouse, until with a touch, the boldness of which quite astonished her, she fastened the glowing red roses near her round, white throat, and, wonder of wonders! the very first effort produced an effect delightful even to herself. "Can it be possible?" she said in her amazement. "Why, I never hoped to succeed under four attempts at the very least! What a trouble I used to be to poor dear Jessie! And I'll declare! Why, my hair isn't flopperty to-

day! It keeps quite in its place! Have I really put my things on properly I should like to know? What have I forgotten? Something, that's certain; my head, most probably. Ah, there's nobody to tell me now! And yet it strikes me I am looking rather better than usual. If I can only find my gloves! My "swedes," as Jessie used to call them. Where on earth did I put them?"

It was some minutes before she could find them; she came upon them at last among a tangled mass of odds and ends, for in vain had Jessie provided her with many a Japanese glove-box, so radically untidy was Alison, in spite of her neat exterior.

At last she managed to get on her gloves, and to fasten all their many buttons without breaking one off. She ran downstairs, passed the baize door that divided their private apartments from the business offices, and was soon in the wide entrance hall.

John Harbuckle's office door stood open.

Alison peeped in cautiously. He was alone, his grey head bending over a great ledger. Alison went in.

"Uncle John!" she whispered hurriedly. "Look at me. Tell me if I'm all right. I've had no one to help me dress."

John Harbuckle twisted round slowly on his high office stool (for he despised such modern luxuries as armchairs and low desk-tables), and he surveyed his niece kindly, but critically, with his clear blue eyes.

"So much the better, my dear," said he, with an approving smile. "You look like your own self, and what could be more charming?"

"Ah, dear Uncle John, you always have something nice and encouraging to say! But really now, am I all right?"

And she turned up her face as she put the question with so naïve a blending of real inquiry and gaiety, that John Harbuckle got down from his stool—which

was a most unusual thing for him to do at that time of day—and devoted all his powers of criticism to his niece.

"My dear," he said seriously, after he had again carefully surveyed her, "I do not understand the delicate intricacies of your toilette, but it strikes me the effect, as a whole, is exceedingly good, and that you present an admirable example of a girl of this decade of the nineteenth century."

"That's your kind way of looking at me. Don't you think a juster—I mean, a less biassed criticism—would pronounce me a distinctly marked specimen of the—of the Unpopular?" said Alison, with a slight imitation of John Harbuckle's phraseology that she knew her uncle always liked to hear from her.

"The Unpopular?" he asked with a very definite smile.

"Yes; Dry-as-dust, Blue-stocking, Antiquary, moss-grown old Fossil—that sort of thing!" she laughed.

"And a very good sort of thing too! a very good sort of thing too!" exclaimed John Harbuckle. "The roses"—touching them — "the roses and the gown go beautifully together. It was very remiss of me not to have got some for you; but I could hardly have chosen them so well. Yes"—looking at her as if she had been a newly purchased piece of old Wedgewood —"yes, a good example, a very good example! My respects to the Tower and all it contains!"

"Well, I must be off;" and with a kiss which she knew the old bachelor both expected and valued (how highly valued, though, she could hardly guess), she turned to leave the office. He went with her to the hall door, and stood there to "see her out of sight."

"Dear Uncle John!" said Alison as she went along Trinity Square. "Now, I should never be tired of Uncle John! But the question arises," she continued—for

she was in the habit of holding quite long and sustained conversations with herself—"the question arises here, was even *he* as interesting at twenty-three as he is now? I should say, decidedly not, or that little romance of his early life would have had a different ending. It evidently takes the accumulated experience of many years to make men interesting. They must be forty, at the very least. And women? Women are different from men. All girls, except myself, are interesting," was Alison's dogmatical conclusion. "Ah, how interesting Jessie was to me! Perhaps, then," she went on, as, having crossed through the cab stand, she began the descent of Tower Hill, where the sellers of Views of London, one penny, and pink-covered People's Guides to the Tower, threepence, were packing up for the day, the last ticket for the Armouries and Jewels having already been issued—"perhaps, then," she continued, "it is only Alec's *youngness* that

irritates me so in him.—Not to-day, thanks," she threw in to a woman who was determined to sell her a pink Guide.—"Let me be just to Alec. I should like to know if it's only his youngness that I can't stand. He seems years younger than I am; and yet—why, now I come to think of it—(Not to-day. I really don't want a Guide. I know the Tower by heart—every bit of it)—Alec is two months older than I am. But here I am, at the Tower, and I'm going to give myself a holiday from all these perplexing questions. Ah me! ah me!" with a long, deep sigh, "once more, I'll strive my hardest to be quite fancy free. Those were happy days when I could entirely lose myself in Old London, without a thought of anything else. I'll try to do so this afternoon if ever I did in my life; so, note-book! note-book! Mental, of course; but I've a pretty good memory when I give my mind to a thing; and if an historical house, on Tower Green,

that I've never been into before, can't inspire me, nothing can; I hope I shall take home something good for you, my dear J pen!"

"Too late for the Armouries and Jools; last ticket issued," said a warder in the well-known Beef-eater undress. You should go to church parade before St. Peter's ad Vincula, on Easter Morning, if you would see the warders in all their scarlet glory, with their quaint embroideries of rose, shamrock, and thistle, if you would study the many and various expressions the Tudor ruff can assume—from stately and picturesque stiffness to the undignified flop of a Dog Toby frill. On the whole, it is perhaps a good thing that ruffs have gone out of fashion; they are such very trying, ticklish wear. The warders don't use these things on working days.

"The Queen's House," said Alison. "I know the way quite well, thanks."

The man touched his low-crowned hat,

that was stuck round with innumerable little bows of red, white, and blue, and withdrew respectfully.

Alison went over the bridge across the moat. In the brilliant sunlight the dry grey of the walls and towers, the scarlet of the Guards' coats, the glitter here and there of a sentry's blue steel bayonet, was almost dazzling. Alison was not sorry to get into the deep shadow of the Byward Tower, and of the great brown wall beyond the blackened Belfry—the wall of the Queen's House. As she was passing beneath that time-honoured wall, where hewn stone, brown-grey flints, and old brick are so mingled that the eye of the unlearned can scarcely tell which was the original material, Alison heard music coming from an open window high overhead.

She listened for an instant; she was fond of music, having plenty of it in her soul, although not much at her finger-tips. She could not tell what was being played, but it

went on and on with that continuity of sound that immediately arrests attention to which only the skilful musician attains.

She walked on in the shadow of the great wall of the Queen's House—so the ancient "Lieutenant's Lodgings" are now labelled—the music following her; she paused again, a moment or two later, to look at the Traitor's Gate. And still the music went on. Familiar as it was to her, the wonderful symmetry of the arch over the gate struck her as more beautiful than ever that afternoon; never before had its tragic associations been to her more vivid.

"And that's where they brought the prisoners in; and they never went out no more," she overheard a poor woman who was carrying a "People's Guide" explain to her ragged children.

"What, never no more, mother?" asked a small boy, looking up into his mother's face with awe-stricken eyes.

The distant music—how Alison remem-

bered this!—the distant music and the poor mother's answer reached her together:—"Never no more!"

The woman's simple words touched Alison. She stood for an instant looking down at that closed gate of doom, and at the grass peacefully growing beyond it; she was full of sympathy with the many victims who had toiled up those now dry stairs and under that grim portcullis of the Bloody Tower just behind her, to meet their doom. But it never struck her (how should it?) that when she left the Traitor's Gate, she herself was even then turning to face her own destiny. She *was* facing her destiny then. Was the edge of the axe towards her?

On the broad steps above the Bloody Tower, an artist who had been making a water-colour sketch of the ancient gateway was shutting up his paint box. It was four o'clock. The Public's day was over.

On the sunny plateau, from which the

White Tower rises abruptly, a warder was showing his last party of visitors the little paved square where royal heads had fallen beneath the executioner's axe, and where Queen Victoria has placed a small memorial brass.

A couple of Scandinavian peasant women in thick shoes, short voluminous skirts, and fair heads tied up in bright-coloured shawls —emigrants probably, waiting for a steamer to take them another stage in their long journey to the Far West—were staring vacantly up at the great foreign White Tower they would never see again.

"Too late for the Armouries," said the warder, approaching Alison.

She told him her destination; he let her pass.

In front of the fatal square was a *chevaux de frise* guarding the private ground from the public. She raised the metal rod that barred the entrance to a paved walk, replaced it, and passed on.

Often and often, in the days that were to come, she recalled with a fond regret how heart whole, how one with what she looked at, how far from thinking of herself, of her future, she had been at that moment! Only, as she so well remembered, on her way to the sentry-guarded house at the end of the walk, among the lime trees of the Tower Green, there were two ravens, two great glossy ravens, sitting side by side on the top of a garden seat; and as she passed them she said idly, meaning nothing—

"Quoth the raven, never more!"

Ominous words! Not that she thought of them the second after they had passed through her brain; nor was there, in the sleek, well-cared-for birds, sitting in the full sunshine, side by side, as kindly as if they had been doves, anything prophetic of evil. There was not a caw nor a croak in either of them, nor in Alison's mind; only, it is natural to any one who

has read the American's haunting poem to couple any raven with, "Never more!" And to Alison, whose inner life was passed much among books, quotations (not always quite correct) sprang up spontaneously. The poor woman's words and the ragged boy's awe-stricken question may, however, have had something to do with it.

Linger, linger, dear, one minute longer! Lose yourself, my Alison, once again in what surrounds you, before you enter that iron door! Ah, she needs no urging! The quaint mediæval houses, with their many gables, their casements, their carved barge-boards, the church, the square, the White Tower—all she could see on that Green, so crowded with clustering memories, these make her linger, these fill her heart, her brain; so fancy free she was, so absorbed in what was round her, as she crossed from the site of the ancient scaffold to the Queen's House.

She knocked. The massive, iron-studded door gave out a metallic sound. It was opened: she crossed the threshold. She went through a wide hall, cool in deep shadow. There was a flush of red light on the stairs. A moment later, a fair-haired girl, the daughter of the house, in a red silk gown, with tall *collets montés à la reine Elizabeth*, advanced swiftly towards her with welcoming, outstretched hands.

"I thought it must be you!" she exclaimed; "I saw you pass under the window just now all alone. I am so glad you have come! Madame Hertzog is here. She came with a party to look over the Tower; she can't stay long, that's why we were obliged to be early. She is going to sing in a minute, so you are fortunately in time. I was afraid you would be too late."

"It is so good of you to think of me—of us," said Alison. "My mother is sorry she could not come; but she had promised

to go down to Woolwich to see the Gregsons—my father's colonel and his wife, you know. They are only just home from India."

"Shall I tell you what I call you to myself?" Alison added suddenly, as the two girls went up the broad staircase, side by side, and she looked into her companion's face with that curious little sharp smile of hers.

"What you call me?" asked the other.

"I call you 'the Princess Elizabeth;' you look so thoroughly Tudoresque in that red dress and ruff. It's quite an inspiration of yours; it is so in keeping with the place! I have seen you in it before."

"Yes? I'm glad you like it! The Princess Elizabeth—ah, poor thing! they didn't let her run about wild here as I do. She was a prisoner in the Bell Tower that belongs to us, you know, although this house was not built until the latter part of her reign, they say.

Fortunately, I am very much at home here."

So chatting, the two girls entered the drawing-room together.

It was large, but of a much lower pitch than a modern room of the same size would be. It was lighted by one wide window, in which was a deep settle, now full of people. From the window one looked out on to the broad, crowded Thames, the Thames below Bridge. The sun was right above the river, which was one flood of living gold. The light streamed past the window, leaving the room itself in a rich, warm shade.

After a few words with her hostess, Alison found herself sitting near the piano, with a cup of tea in her hand that had been brought to her by a young Guardsman, whom she had already met several times, and who was commonly called Hughie Merriman. He was, in fact, a nephew of that Major Merriman

who, the year before, had in vain tried to become Alison's step-father.

The young man felt, most illogically, he owed Alison a debt of gratitude on account of his uncle's failure; so not being otherwise occupied, he stood by her chair, and they exchanged a few ordinary remarks.

People were standing or sitting about all over the room, some grouped around the tea-table, some in the centre. Presently, there was a flutter near the piano.

"Madame Herzog is going to sing. Magnificent voice! Have you heard her?" asked Hugh Merriman.

"No," said Alison; and the grand contralto beginning, she stopped suddenly, and turned towards the voice.

The hum of conversation ceased, the groups that had occupied the centre of the room dissolved, moving to the sides, and leaving the space clear for the singer. There was an impressive quiet as the full,

clear notes rose slowly one by one, impelling attention. As the song went on all grew hushed into perfect stillness; no one moved; you might have heard the swish of steam-boats on the river.

No one moved, did I say? What was it, then, but a movement that stealthily drew Alison's intent gaze away from the singer? If not a movement, what was it? A movement, then a hand, a hand that slowly, slowly moved; a long, slender hand, that seemed more intimately related to a brain than the hands of most men. There was something magnetic, fascinating about that hand; when once Alison's gaze had rested upon it she heard the song no more.

A moment passed before Alison raised her eyes from that hand to its director, to the picture in a remote corner of the room, of which that hand was the centre.

There he stood—never, never to be forgotten—there he stood, tall, slight, young; his imperious head showing dark against a

background of pale summer flowers, his strange face deeply overshadowed by a mass of dark, close-curling hair, his fixed gaze intent upon the work of his hand. There he stood, while all around were listening to that rich womanly voice, cut off from all of them by the absolute concentration of his own mind upon himself and his own hand's work.

And what was it that hand was doing? Alison looking at it as if mesmerized, the song, the singer, all else in the world grown for the time dim to her—Alison saw—and although it was a warm June day, and the Thames was shining in burning splendour, she felt her spine turn cold with a sudden thrill—Alison saw that the long and slender hand, so finely wrought, so intimately connected with the brain in that curious dark head, was slowly turning the winch of a model of the Rack.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMING MAN.

THE song was finished, the music ceased, the hum of voices told that the spell was broken; but the young man with the wonderful hand, who appeared not to have been under that spell at all, went on turning the winch for a little while longer. Apparently neither song nor silence made the slightest difference to him; he lived, it seemed, in a world of his own, of which he was absolutely the master. The groups re-formed in the centre of the room, hiding from Alison his hand, but not his head.

The young Guardsman by her chair bent towards her, after he had glanced in the

direction from which he noticed Alison had just turned.

"Extraordinary being! Know him?" he asked under his voice, quite seriously.

"Who is he?" said Alison, also under her voice.

"The Coming Man!" returned the soldier, with an air of conviction the words themselves hardly warranted.

Alison was struck by the incongruity; it amused her. The thrill she had felt had been but instantaneous.

"What, another? And there are so many already!" she said lightly, with an interrogative movement of the eyebrows and a slight laugh. "How crowded the future will be!"

"I mean it, though; he's the Coming Man," repeated Merriman, with enthusiasm.

Poor fellow! or shall I say, happy fellow? He was still young enough to be under the influence of that grand primitive passion, hero worship. Just now the man with

the hand was his demi-god; so much so that his mind was even then distracted between the wish to expatiate on his hero's greatness and the curiosity he felt about what his hero was doing, for he was unaware of the rack and winch incident.

Even had he noticed it, it would not have struck him as it did Alison. He was used to that little model of the rack and its victim; it was a familiar toy to him; he had often played with it himself, and thought nothing of it. The man with the hand, however, was not playing with it; every line of the face, which was a very remarkable one, was looking down with the most profound intentness.

The wish to see what his hero was doing was about to gain the victory—for Alison was not at all an attractive girl to Hugh Merriman, and he had talked to her nearly long enough—when the owner of the wonderful hand saved him further trouble, by crossing the crowded room to him and

seizing the one top button that fastened his tightly fitting coat.

"I want to demonstrate to you," Alison heard him begin to the Guardsman. The voice, the intonation, struck her at once. It had the same perfect finish as the hand and the whole contour; it suggested—ah, what did it not suggest to her? It was a perfect English accent, so was the young Guardsman's; but they were as different as possible. The soldier's had no idiosyncrasy, no *picturesqueness*, if one may use such a term of a voice; it was as much according to regulation as his fair moustache. But the other's was quite individual. It be longed to no set, no school; it suggested no drill: it was its owner's own. "I want to demonstrate to you," it went on, "how thoroughly the sounds we have just heard prove what I have often tried to make you see about that biped——"

"Which?" demanded Merriman, looking in perplexity at his instructor.

"The one who wrote what Madame Herzog has just sung. I won't call it a song, and I won't call it music, because that would be to wrong two noble and beautiful words; I will call it simply—Rot."

Alison heard the remark. It interested her extremely. It aroused, it brought into immediate play, half a dozen of her faculties; delightful sensation!

"But, my dear fellow, of course, I don't for a moment pretend to understand the science of music, but it was exquisite! And the voice, the glorious voice!" exclaimed Merriman.

This was also Alison's opinion. She wondered in her simplicity that another should be possible; but it indefinitely enlarged her horizon that another view was indeed possible. It had to her the charm of a far-off range of mountains suddenly appearing in an unsuspected opening between nearer hills.

"As to the voice, I agree with you; but

I consider it criminal to allow such a voice to waste itself on a series of abortive attempts at a wretched melody, which, low as its standard is, never attains it. Give me one idea well carried through. But I see you don't understand me. Look here; I want to show you——"

And with that and a great many more words, the long, slender hand with the brain in it having taken possession of Hughie Merriman's arm, that gallant young officer was led off to a vacant spot near the window, where he doubtless received further instruction, if not enlightenment.

Alison would have given a great deal to have heard more of that instruction. She was sorry it was out of hearing; she was also not quite pleased that the instructor had taken Merriman away with him. The place where they had stood seemed blank.

Alison was used to considering herself as a specially unattractive girl, as, indeed,

"the type of the Unpopular," Jessie, the Beauty, having hitherto monopolized nearly all the attentions of strangers. When Alison had gone out with Jessie, she had, as a matter of course, never expected any one to take notice of her, and, to confess the truth, she had seldom been disappointed, except in the case of Alec Carruthers, and that was only "because, poor fellow, he is too shy to speak to any one else," she said, "and I've generally been kind to him." She was, therefore, quite used to thinking of herself as merely one of the unnoticeable many; but for all that, she was just a little annoyed at Merriman's being conveyed away from her.

A remark, however, from the lady sitting next to her opened a conversation that at once proved interesting.

"The insufferable conceit and priggishness of young men who think they understand music!"

"I am sure I thought it was a very

lovely song," said Alison humbly, perceiving that the mysterious young man's criticism had been overheard by some one else besides herself.

"So it was," returned the other. "But he has the most peculiar views on every subject," she added, looking in the direction of the open window, where the strongly marked profile of the dark head stood in bold relief against the bright space out-of-doors.

"You know him, then?" said Alison.

"We all know him here in the Tower; and some of us are tired of him."

"Who is he?" asked Alison.

"*Who* he is—that is, who his people are, I cannot say; but *what* he is, at least to me, I can tell you in a couple of words—he is a bore."

"I should hardly have thought it; he doesn't look at all commonplace," said Alison.

"No, indeed! I only wish he were!"

"He belongs to the service, then? He is in your regiment?" asked Alison. "No, that can't be; he has a beard, or something like one," correcting herself after a hasty glance at the profile.

"Oh no! He is not in our service, nor in any other, except his own. On the contrary, he has the most unmitigated hatred and contempt (to use his favourite expressions) for everybody and everything connected with the army, except the hundred and ten ton gun, for which he says he has a certain respect, because it carries its idea to a distance that at least removes it from contempt."

Alison smiled. "But you have scarcely described 'a bore,' have you?" she asked with considerable *naïveté*.

"Ah! If you only had a husband who said nothing the whole day except, 'As Penrose says,' or 'As Penrose wants to demonstrate'—for you must know he is always wanting to demonstrate—or 'I

suppose you have heard Penrose's last;' if you had a husband who made your life a burden to you by quoting Basil Penrose ten thousand times a day, you would be inclined to wish, as I do, that your residence was not fixed in the Tower, but that you belonged to the Guards, who are moving out next week."

"I wonder they like him if he hates the army," said Alison.

"Oh, they take it as a mere *façon de parler!* They say he is such a distraction. He certainly is to me, but in quite another sense. Look! he has gone off to Madame Herzog; he is trying to bring the crime of having sung that song home to her. She won't see it. She too is trying to demonstrate."

"If I could but hear what they are saying!" thought Alison, watching that face, always shaded with the overhanging thatch of dark hair, as it bent down intently towards the broad-visaged German woman,

who was evidently fighting Basil Penrose with great energy.

What a firm, strong base there was to that nose of his with the long, incisive dip! What sensitiveness in the short, morose upper lip; what defiant obstinacy in the too-prominent chin! It was a strange, unfamiliar face to see in company with English soldiers. But if it was certainly the most remarkable face in the room, it would also have been, to eleven persons out of every twelve, the least pleasing. But Alison never went with the eleven; she was never popular; she always went with the one that completed the dozen.

"Then, he is living in the Tower?" she resumed.

"He puts up with one of the warders at the Salt Tower; but why he has chosen such an abode I can't imagine, except that —but, ah! Madame Herzog is going to make him play again! She is escorting him in triumph to the piano! With all

his faults he certainly has a touch. I forgive him much for that. His hands are wonderful."

Indeed, his hands were so wonderful when applied to the piano, that after the first few bars Alison found herself standing where she could see the key-board of the instrument. Had she been indeed mesmerized? How did she get there? Something fascinated her in those fingers. There was something about them quite new to her, totally unlike anything she had seen or heard before. A strange union of mind and mechanism, a very perfect whole of something; what, she could not tell, only she was fascinated by it.

It was the same touch she had heard as she had walked under the wall of the Queen's House to the Traitor's Gate. She recognized the arresting continuity of the sound; so used the little burn that joined the swift mountain stream, under the well-remembered rustic bridge at the

foot of a far-distant brae-side by her old home, compel her to listen to its never-ending song.

Basil Penrose set the music going, and it went on and on, taking her back to the Birrendale streams in the North Countrie—now rushing down a thyme-covered hill, now tumbling over great broken masses of red sandstone, now gliding along a level mill-dam, then thundering over its rocky "call." But on and on it went; it never once left off until it suddenly ceased altogether.

The Princess Elizabeth—I will keep to Alison's soubriquet—had crossed over to the piano; there was, indeed, quite a little crowd around Basil Penrose when he had finished his piece.

"It is quite too delightful!" exclaimed the Princess with enthusiasm. "How do you manage to do it?"

"Pardon me, I do *not* do it," said Basil Penrose emphatically.

"No?"

"I may labour under the imputation of being a conceited prig; but, as a matter of fact, I know I cannot yet interpret a great master. I merely follow him the best way I can, humbly, and at a long distance."

As he turned to the girl in the red silk dress, Alison, for the first time, caught a glimpse of his eyes. They were a surprise to her. They were so different from the rest of his face. They were like bright brown velvet, with a very high light on the top of the fold. John Harbuckle would have recognized them at once as indications of a mixed race. They were whimsical with what struck one at first sight, and only for the briefest space of time, an almost girlish shyness, that with inconceivable rapidity changed, and became strangely penetrating—penetrating, like sunshine, not incisive like the long aquiline dip of the nose. They contrasted

oddly enough with the coolness of his perfect self-possession, and the morose gravity and concentrated intentness of his expression when those eyes could not be seen—when, for instance, he had been looking down at the victim on the rack.

Alison felt a desperate wish to talk to him; she longed to say, "I want to know why"—(she was always wanting to know why)—"Madame Herzog's lovely song was 'criminal,' and your music wasn't." She longed for courage enough to put the question boldly and simply to him.

Perhaps those bright brown eyes read the unasked question, as for one smallest fraction of a second they met Alison's. Be that as it may—and the inner working of Basil Penrose's mind must always remain, even to me, a matter of the merest conjecture, because no one could possibly tell what he was thinking about—be that as it may, he went up to the Princess,

close to whom Alison was standing, and began to her under his voice :—

"I choose that piece because I wanted to show you the difference between a series of miserable *culs-de-sac* like Madame Herzog's, and a simple idea well carried through."

"But they were both beautiful!"

Alison could not keep back the exclamation.

"They were *not*," said Penrose with the greatest decision. "One was the work of a master; the other, Madame Herzog's, by some driveller of to-day. Not that I despise to-day, because, on the whole, it's about the best day we've had yet; but that's not saying much for it, as we are only just beginning to emerge from barbarism. The other, Madame Herzog's, was —in the presence of ladies I must supply the only appropriate adjective mentally, forgive me if I pause to do so,"—he paused—"the other, as I observed just now to Merriman, was R-r-ot!"

And as he slowly rang the extra R, he twisted his tightly clenched fist as if he were trying to turn a very stiff, heavy screw, which task at length accomplishing, he enunciated the T as sharply as possible. He made very much of that little three-lettered word.

Alison, totally unused to men of the Basil Penrose sort—for although there are plenty about just now who superficially resemble him, this was the first time she had met one—hardly knew how to follow up this remark. She looked puzzled but amused.

"I want you to see," Basil Penrose went on, fixing his penetrating glance sternly upon her, and intensifying the expression by a sudden scowl—"I want you to see the criminality, the immorality, of a woman with a magnificent voice going about the world propagating bad art, making it seem beautiful!" With which parting remark he left Alison, and sought out

his young Guardsman, who was then talking to a very pretty girl.

"Who is that uneducated young woman?" he asked in a tone that expressed anger, sorrow, and contempt.

"Oh, Mr. Penrose, we are all so fearfully below your standard that we must all appear uneducated to you!" exclaimed the very pretty girl lightly. "Which one of us all do you mean?"

"I mean the one with the red, red roses; the one who is now talking to our hostess," said Penrose with sullen gravity, as if to rebuke the very pretty girl for her flippancy.

"What, Alison Bayliss! Why, she's so clever I'm afraid to speak to her! She writes!"

But this was not a crusher to Basil Penrose.

"Writes! Poor déluded lady!" drawing his eyes back under his scowling brows with an intensity of horror and pity;

whether real or assumed, the very pretty girl could not tell. "Having heard that, I can stay here no longer. I cannot breathe in the same room as a woman who writes without knowledge. If you please, I'll go and take a turn at my lathe, hoping to get the sounds that German woman has perpetrated out of my ears."

He went off. That is to say, he went as far as Alison, and dropping his voice, said to her with a distinctly clerical impressiveness and quite a pulpit tone:—

"I trust you are now sensible of the wickedness of what Madame Herzog sang?"

Alison could not understand it. The tone was earnest, although changed. She coloured, and for a moment had no answer at her command. Only for a moment; then she said with decision:—

"Really, I don't in the least know what you mean! I thought the song was beautiful; I think so still."

"That is very sad."

"Why?" asked Alison sharply.

Basil Penrose shrugged his shoulders, bowed, withdrew.

"I'm a hopeless case!" was Alison's remark to herself as the door closed upon Basil Penrose, the expression on that young man's face beginning already to haunt her and fill her with contrition. "I suppose I must be a culpably ignorant creature. It's odd, but it never struck me quite so vividly before."

Already she was much lower in her own eyes than she had been when she and the Princess had met in the old panelled hall.

When she herself was presently leaving, she overheard a singularly intelligent-looking old lady observe to the Chaplain, who had lately entered, and was near the door—

"Hands, yes; and mind, yes—but no soul."

Could they also have been discussing Basil Penrose? Alison wondered.

CHAPTER V.

THE WATCHER ON THE GREEN.

Scarcely had Alison crossed the Tower Moat than Alec Carruthers called at John Harbuckle's house, and for the first time in his life boldly asked for Miss Bayliss.

It had required a desperate effort, but the effort having been made he felt equal to another, and without a moment's hesitation, as soon as he heard where she had gone, he followed the path she had just trodden, and while she was listening to the music in the drawing-room of the Queen's House, he was sitting outside on the Green, with his gaze intently fixed on its sentry-guarded door.

There he sat, watching that door with

eyes that never for an instant strayed from their object, as a man by the sick-bed of his best beloved watches her face when life and death are trembling in the all but even balance. The garden seat he occupied was on the paved quadrangle called Tower Green. It was in front of that old state prison, the Beauchamp Tower. To the left was the Church of St. Peter ad Vincula, where headless queens and nobles are buried; at the watcher's feet the site of the ancient scaffold on which their heads fell; to the right, among the trees on the Green, a stony path led from that fatal spot to the heavy, iron-studded door of the Tudor residence in the south and west corners of the quadrangle — the "Lieutenant's Lodgings" of old records, now—"The Queen's House."

Alec Carruthers was as unmistakably Scotch as his name. As he sat there watching that door out of those eyes of his that were set so far back under his brows,

it was hard to tell their colour. Concentrated as every faculty was upon the one point, somewhere in the depths of his consciousness he was aware that the last victims whose heads had fallen on Tower Hill were Scotsmen also.

The westering sun, touching his hair, struck out a gleam of the northern fire from the brown; a sudden added pang of expectancy now and then brought, as it seemed, his gaze forward with eagerness, and showed a spark of keen, clear Scottish blue in his eyes.

It was when the door of the Queen's House was opened that this light in his eyes appeared. It opened several times. There came out now a couple of Guardsmen, now a lady or two, then a dark young man who went off with very swift steps. The door closed heavily behind them all. In the quiet air, he could hear its metallic clang. And as that door closed he relapsed, with a sigh, into the expression he had worn

ever since he had been watching there. Others came, but She came not.

"I can wait," he said, after many such a disappointment. "It is just the one thing I can do—I can wait."

"Wait!" As he sat there watching, he looked capable of waiting on until the end of all things!

He was a large-boned Scot; young, and at present unequally developed, but likely to be a fine, handsome man at forty, if he could succeed in living to that age. Until within the last two or three years, however, he had had a good deal of difficulty in living at all; he was so long in getting a firm grip of existence.

To the ordinary observer he seemed to have most things a young man can need: a fair position (his father was Alexander Carruthers, the Laird of Muirhead, Birrendale), an ample income, devoted parents, a natural bent for all that makes life honourable; and yet existence, which had always

been hard to him, grew to be positive torture as he watched the door of the Queen's House.

"When will it be over?" The words would force themselves from his heart, try as he might to keep them down. "She must come. It cannot be much longer. When she comes, I will speak—I will make her speak; I will know my fate. It can't be worse than this uncertainty!"

But even as he said the words, he felt it might be worse, infinitely worse; she might say—No!

There was only one word that to Alec expressed all he could feel; that word was her name—Alison. To him past, present, future—all he hoped for, all he dreaded, was just—Alison. How he loved her! Down to the very deepest depths of his deep being, how he loved her! And he felt, after her coldness to him on the wedding-day—how could he help feeling?—that "No!" was possible. Would the door of the Queen's House never open for her?

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN IN WAITING.

"MUST you go now?" the Princess asked, as Alison rose to leave. "Because if you could stay until the people are gone I could show you over the house. There's the Gunpowder Plot Room, and many other objects of interest which I'm sure you would like to see."

"Thanks," said Alison, "but I must go home now. Uncle John will be alone. You will let me come some other time, won't you? Or, perhaps, if you value your own peace you will *not*, because I should worry you fearfully. I'm not safe to be trusted near anything historical; it's so shocking of me! I make people afraid of me, you

know; I bore them so dreadfully, and they hate it so much."

"Oh, but *I'm* not 'people!' I love any one who really loves the Tower, and I'm sure you do! Come again soon, when we are alone. I'll show you everything."

So talking the two girls had left the drawing-room, and were standing at a window on the corridor overlooking the Green; for this most delightful old house being built at right angles, somewhat in the shape of a plain capital L, has a face for each quarter—north, towards the Green and St. Peter's Church; south, overlooking the Thames; east, confronting the White Tower; west, commanding the City of London.

"This is really too charming!" exclaimed Alison, taking in the view from the window.

"We are very fond of it," returned the Princess.

A number of pigeons were fluttering about the execution square; one or two of

them flew up to the north-west turret of the White Tower, now transformed by the sun into a Tower almost as golden, but infinitely more beautiful than the Salt-cellar of State one may see for sixpence, among the Regalia in the Jewel House.

"Ah!" said the Princess, as the birds took refuge in the turret. "That is where that Mr. Penrose works. But good-bye. I mustn't stay now!"

"Good-bye," returned Alison, and then uttered a little cry of dismay.

"Yes?" asked the Princess.

"Oh, nothing! Good-bye," returned Alison, forcing a smile; and she went slowly downstairs, feeling very distinctly as if she were going to execution.

What sight had she seen from the window that could so have dismayed her? Basil Penrose again was it? Ah, no!

There was the quadrangle with its quaint houses, its towers, its church, its barracks, all peacefully resting in the

westering sunlight, all so bright, so still; the work of the day over, the gentle flicker of the lime-tree leaves the only movement noticeable, until Alison's eye had happened to catch sight of the two ravens, large and glossy, dancing, as if on tiptoes, with their wings outspread—and giving very much the effect of last, century ladies going through the *Minuet à la cour*—on the ground before the garden seat, where sat Alec Carruthers steadily watching the door. She knew he was watching for her coming, and her heart sank and sank and sank, as she recognized the well-remembered form of the young heir of Muirhead.

All through the empty hours since Jessie's wedding—all through the long morning of that very day, up to the point of time when she had seen the hand that turned the rack—at any moment, had he come to her, he might, perhaps, have "driven liking to love," and his familiar

figure would have seemed the right one for her to choose for her lifelong companion.

But now—now she had seen Basil Penrose, and already to her imagination a whole new world had sprung into being. There had been a sudden cleft in the walls that bound her mental horizon, a vague new landscape lay beyond, and in that landscape there was no Alec Carruthers. His presence before her, alive and real, seemed now like an intrusion; she would have given anything to have escaped meeting him. But escape was impossible; she could not leave the house without his seeing her.

The door was opened for her; there was nothing for her to do but to go and meet him with as decent a show of composure as she could command. He had seen her leave the threshold, he had risen, he was coming towards her.

Then, as never before, she felt how

much he loved her; then, as never before, came the wild wish to get away from the declaration of that love, to save him from humiliation—for kindness was the first law of her nature—to save herself from a future from which she now shrank, so wearisome it seemed.

They met: he took her hand. His grasp, although she could feel his hand tremble, struck her as wider and larger than it had been; he appeared to her to have grown altogether taller and stronger since last they met; and she felt as if she herself had grown smaller.

"I thought—I thought you were in Scotland," she began, her voice fluttering up and down, in spite of her effort to control it.

Alec took one hasty glance at her flushed face and downcast eyes. He felt she was not too well pleased to see him; the words that had been burning on his lips froze there suddenly.

She was not glad to see him, and he knew it. They turned both of them together, and walked on towards the parade ground. After a moment's silence, Alec spoke.

"I should be away; but I just couldn't go," he said in a slow sing-song—a clinging tone, a northern modulation that helped out the sense of the words with a pathos that went straight to Alison's heart.

She made no reply; she felt as if she could scarcely breathe, it was so dreadful to be obliged to hurt Alec—Alec, of whom everybody was so careful; whom Mac had once been obliged to take to Nice, in order to save his life; who was only just within a couple of years or so growing strong;—it was a frightful thing to have to hurt Alec, to hurt him, perhaps, very much indeed.

"I just couldn't get away," repeated Alec, in the same slow pathetic tone.

"No?" Alison put in vaguely. "Oh, if only one of us *could* get away! If the earth would swallow up one of us!" she felt.

But it did not; the broad stone steps that led down from the Green paid no heed to her frantic wish.

"I went to St. Pancras this forenoon," Alec continued. "I took my ticket; but when I saw the train, I just couldn't go. I couldn't do it! Three hundred miles is such a long, long bit of country to put between us—I couldn't do it!"

"I thought you went home by the night-mail on the wedding-day," said Alison, trying hard to give the remark a matter-of-fact sound.

"No; I just couldn't go. I've been wearying for you all the time," said Alec.

"I hope I did not keep you waiting long on the Green," Alison managed to say. But speech was almost as hard for her just then as for Alec.

"It does not matter; you came at last. I can always wait; it is the one thing I can do well."

They were passing beneath the portcullis when he spoke the words.

"Am I doomed to fall a victim to his Scottish patience? Is that my inevitable fate? No, no! As yet it is not inevitable. I must strike for my liberty, now or never."

Wild thoughts serged through Alison's heart and brain; the vision of a freer, more independent life, of vigorous self-development, of work on a better scale than anything she had yet imagined, incited her to fight back the sentiment—love, perhaps, or some feeling akin to it—that gave Alec a certain hold over her.

They turned the corner. The dim vision of this future of work and energy, the shadowy abstract idea, met her view in concrete form. Basil Penrose was walking swiftly before them beside the wall of the Queen's

House. She felt as if she must run, must fly after him. She showed no outward sign, but the sight of him gave her courage to fight.

"I've been enjoying myself so much this afternoon!" she exclaimed, making a desperate attempt to turn the current.

"That is more than I have done," put in Alec dolefully. "I've been just wretched."

"Ay; you need Mac!"

"It's not *that*," said Alec, looking out of his deep-set eyes with all his heart at Alison.

She knew it, but she would not seem to see. "I miss Jessie fearfully," was all she said.

"Alison, what has come to you? Why are you changed?" Alec asked, as if painfully groping for the cause.

"Am I changed?" she asked gently, touched by his troubled tone. "Is it you, perhaps?"

"I? I love you!"

The words sprang out into the air, as if they had leaped off some mountain crag in the hidden fastnesses of his being.

She trembled with the shock they gave her, as the echo of them reverberated through her own heart. It was all she could do to hold back that echo from her lips; but the swiftly moving figure of Basil Penrose, which had been for a few minutes obscured by the gloom as it passed under the archway of the Byward Tower, now came out into the bright sunlight as it crossed the bridge over the Moat.

Alison walked on in silence by Alec's side. In silence they passed the archway, in silence crossed the bridge over the Moat. The mighty words, "I love you!" and their echo died away.

Alec, in an agony of confusion, looked at Alison's proudly averted head, and knew he had done wrong. It was not until they were in the shadow of the Middle Tower that he again ventured to speak. To save

his life he could not at the moment have spoken again of himself or of his love.

"You once were fond of Birrendale. You told me that when you were leaving you said, 'I cannot leave you, Birrendale!'" he began.

"Ah!" cried Alison, with a sudden outburst of genuine enthusiasm, gaining speech and freedom now the topic was local and not human—"ah! that was efore I had learned to love London!"

"And you cannot care for Birrendale one wee bit now, Alison? You have forgotten it?"

"Forget it? How can I forget it when my father's grave is there?" said Alison under her voice.

"And we could be much in London—as much as you——" began Alec.

She stopped him at once; she began to talk without cessation, as if her very existence depended upon her words.

"Ah," she said, "what devotion the old

Londoners had for their City! and I feel the same. How Spenser, who was born near here, you know, calls London—

"'Merrie London, my most kindly nurse!'

She's mine, too, for I was born at Uncle John's house. And Herrick, our Cheapside poet, sings (he has such a charming way of singing, hasn't he? His is such true song):

"'Ravished in spirit I come—nay, more, I fly
To thee, blest place of my nativity!'

And the way in which they loved and praised the river—'the Broad-water of Thames,'—how fine it was! As I sat by that open window at the Queen's House, this afternoon, looking right down on the Thames, it seemed to me all so new, so fresh, and yet so dear and familiar, that—I don't know—I almost thought I had never known or loved London before; and yet I have, ever since I came here from Scotland. Perhaps you fancy I *am* Scotch because I used to live in Birrendale and was so

fond of it; but I'm not Scotch at all; I'm English. I'm a Londoner; I must always be a Londoner. I can never be anything else! I was born in that old house on Tower Hill, where Uncle John and our grandparents and great-grandparents used to live. Mother isn't proud of being a citizeness, but I am. I do enjoy myself so much here; and Uncle John and I go out prowling of an evening. We get into the funniest places sometimes. A few Sundays ago we went down Ratcliffe Highway, after evening service. What a sight it was! People from all parts of the world. And a few evenings before that we went down——" and so she kept on all the way home.

Poor Alec! He was quite talked out of Court. As Alison talked, Alec grew more and more depressed; and yet, never before had he so much admired her; never before had he seen her so thoroughly excited, never heard her talk so freely; and her

simple, fervent words seemed to him like eloquence, in spite of his conviction that she was talking only to silence him.

And so she was; but her love for London was a genuine, red-hot enthusiasm for all that. If he could but have joined her in it, even then the two might, by the force and heat of a strong common interest, have been welded together.

But Alec's mental powers were only able to go in one direction at one time. Just then they were set upon Alison herself, not upon her likings; and it never occurred to him to try to win her love through her likings. Had the idea occurred to him, he would most probably have regarded it as a stratagem unworthy both of Alison and himself; so he let her talk on until they reached John Harbuckle's house.

"There is another!" he then said abruptly, interrupting her in the middle of a sentence, with a keen flash of jealousy in the intense blue of his eyes.

"What do you mean? Another what?" demanded Alison as abruptly.

"Another man," said Alec bluntly.

"You ought to know better! You ought to know the whole thing is entirely out of my line! Entirely! Pray do not let us talk nonsense any more!" said Alison, in a tone that might have swept away an army of suitors.

"It may be nonsense to you; it's a matter of life and death to me," Alec threw back at her.

Alison paused for a second before the open door of her home. "Will you come in?" she asked, with an attempt at mere commonplace courtesy that was more than Alec could stand.

He raised his hat and walked away. It was all over in a moment.

CHAPTER VII.

HER MOTHER'S POINT OF VIEW.

Mrs. Bayliss had been exceedingly pleased with her visit to Woolwich. Her late husband's regiment was quartered there just then, so that besides the Colonel and his wife, she had met or heard of a good many old friends.

She had also talked more than a little. A matron who has just married off one of her girls, naturally has an excellent topic, and is generally in an enviable state of mind, provided she has not too many unmanageable bills to cope with. In Mrs. Bayliss's case her brother, John Harbuckle, had been so lavishly romantic about money,

that she herself had been spared all anxiety on that score. The event was peculiarly soothing to her. She brooded over the details, especially over those of her own planning, for an unlimited time, extracting from the process an amount of pleasure truly wonderful.

But wonderful as this pleasure was, it was nothing compared with the satisfaction afforded her by two other subjects.

One of the subjects was Mrs. Carruthers of Muirhead, who was known to look very coldly on the already accomplished marriage; the other was the fact that Alec Carruthers had told her Alison was the only girl to whom he had ever been able to talk—which was not only a great deal for so shy a young man as Alec to admit, but which, as Mrs. Bayliss knew very well, would not awaken enthusiastic sympathy in the heart of his mother, who hated Mrs. Bayliss most thoroughly.

Mrs. Bayliss enjoyed an occasional fight,

especially when victory was inclining to her side, as, in the present instance, it seemed to be doing. She had, moreover, a personal liking for Alec Carruthers, who always treated her with that almost affectionate deference she instinctively craved.

She was therefore in a decidedly good temper as she drove slowly to Trinity Square through the City, then undergoing one of its greatest transformations since the rebuilding after the Great Fire. She looked out upon the vast heaps of *débris* and the huge array of scaffolding, and thought of Muirhead—of the wide new house, with its many quaint tourelles clustering around its ancient border tower; of its hillside woods, its level moors, its rushing stream, its still salmon-pool, and forgot how much she detested the City.

A little smile and a slight colour relieved the general monotony of her faded cheeks. When she was in a good temper she was by no means an unpleasant middle-

aged woman; moreover, she still wore deep and handsome mourning, and in widow's weeds no woman can look absolutely uninteresting.

As she neared home, however, the corners of her lips grew somewhat depressed.

"Did I say too much?" she asked herself anxiously, remembering her own remarks at Woolwich. "I'm almost afraid I did!"

Certainly she had talked of Alec and Muirhead as if the matter were settled. It had not struck her at the time that she was going too far; but a horrible suspicion now crossed her mind, that perhaps—"If I could only get Alison to tell me exactly how it stands! I am so afraid of speaking to her. She might—there is really no telling how she might take it! But I must try to. I'll have a talk with her—just a little quiet talk. Now there is no Jessie, perhaps——"

Mrs. Bayliss was only just in time for dinner, having lost the train by which they had expected her. During dinner she talked freely about her delightful afternoon, and drew from Alison a full and elaborate account of everything that had happened since their parting at the station; except that she had seen a young man with a wonderful hand, called Basil Penrose, and that Alec Carruthers had met her at the door of the Queen's House.

But Alison, although she made these reservations, was about as transparent as plate glass. Her mother—indeed, the most casual observer could hardly have failed to do so—noticed at once that the surface of her mind was clouded and disturbed—very much disturbed.

John Harbuckle had it on the tip of his tongue to let his sister know that Alec had called and asked if Alison were in, going over to the Tower to look for her; but as Alison had told him nothing, he

thought he had better keep silence. He was a very cautious man in domestic matters, and a lover of peace.

After dinner Mrs. Bayliss retired to her favourite Bombay chair by the drawing-room window, armed with the new number of the *Graphic* and a gigantic paper-knife, and began speculating on the cause of her daughter's evident excitement, with a view to composing a harmless little question that should lead up to a conversation, which she intended should be very definite indeed.

Alison, poor girl! took up her position in the window-seat that was the furthest from her mother, and awaited what she felt was coming—as Jessie, with her fingers in her ears, used to await the report of each gun, when the Tower battery fired a royal salute.

Her wrath, when she had first re-entered the house, had blazed up furiously against Alec.

"'Another!' What right had he to

say such a word? 'Another!' If he had been—if I had given him the right—if we had been engaged, he could not have said anything stronger! I never gave him the right! Never! He's an intruder, that's what he is! 'Another'—as if he were sure he were the accepted one!"

Thus Alison, in the first transport of wounded pride, "And I, who never flirt! Flirt, indeed! atrocious word! As if I *could*, if I tried! To be accused by him! How could I have treated Mac's cousin differently, unless I had been absolutely rude to him? He should have known better!" —so Alison went on, until her mother's return.

"Oh!" she cried, when she heard Mrs. Bayliss's step on the stairs, "What have I done? what have I done? Now I'll have to hurt mother! Poor mother! she has suffered so much, and her heart is so fixed upon it!"

So she sat now in the window-seat, pre-

tending to read—Alison, who was generally such a devourer of books—with her back to the White Tower and the grey Wellington barracks.

The mother and daughter sat for some time without speaking. Only since Jessie's wedding had they been constant companions. They were as yet hardly used to each other in that relationship; and besides, just then there was an unspoken something between them. Silence oppressed them like a heavy weight. The ebbing tide of traffic was still beating slowly out-of-doors; the Tower bugles sounded twice before either of the occupants of the deeply shadowed room uttered a word. At length, the picture of a bride in the *Graphic* brought matters to a crisis.

"I'll get an ivory *Duchesse* for you, Alison, when your turn comes; Jessie's was a thought too white for you," said Mrs. Bayliss, peeping between two still uncut leaves as she hazarded this remark.

Could any opening have been more unfortunate? Alison's wrath, which had smouldered down to a most miserable feeling of having done wrong, blazed up again at once. She was stung at her consent being taken for granted by everybody; her face flushed painfully, but to her mother she could not dare to seem angry.

"For me!" she exclaimed; "for me, mother!" Then throwing down her book, and seizing a pen that lay on the writing-table close by, "Why!" she cried, with a mixture of firmness and nervousness all her own, as she held up the pen—"*why, I am married already!* Here's my little husband!"

"Goodness, child! What on earth do you mean?" ejaculated Mrs. Bayliss, quite aghast.

"I mean, I'm not going to marry anybody. I'm going to write," said Alison, with more firmness and less nervousness.

Her mother checked the exclamation of

horror that rose to her lips. Something was evidently behind this outbreak; it would not do, however, to treat it too seriously.

"Well, my dear, Alec won't object to your writing; he likes books. I don't suppose he'll be jealous of such a rival," she managed to say with a lightness she did not feel.

Alison laughed uneasily. "No matter! I am quite satisfied with this," she said, making a little dart at her mother with the pen.

"Your pen may satisfy *you* very well, my dear," said Mrs. Bayliss, in her dryest, crudest tone, with a strong and scornful emphasis on the "you." "But I am afraid you have yet to learn that it is one thing to write, and quite another to be read."

"Uncle John and his friend, old Mr. Woolcomb, read what I write, and tell me they enjoy it, mother," said Alison with a little self-assertion.

"A wide public, truly!" threw in Mrs. Bayliss.

Had the remark been made by any one else, Alison would have retorted aloud: "A discriminating one!" As it was, though feeling that she was being driven almost to the verge of undutiful conduct, she only growled the retort to herself.

"You don't believe in me, mother," she said after a moment's pause.

Mrs. Bayliss rose from her chair, crossed the room to Alison's window-seat, and laid her hands upon her daughter's shoulders.

"Believe in you, my child!" she said with genuine motherliness. "Of course I believe in you—as I believe in no one else!"

It was true. Radical were the differences of nature between the two. Alison's ways were too often most annoying to her mother; she was so indifferent to her own worldly advantages of every kind, so

wholly given up to things that were totally uninteresting to Mrs. Bayliss. She really was, and always had been very trying; yet at the bottom of the mother's heart lay a profound respect for her daughter, and for those very qualities of hers that worried her the most. For these qualities she had a feeling such as she might have had for an Article of religion she was bound to accept, but did not carry out, or a devout practice she must observe, but thoroughly disliked, or the respect she had owed to her own parents and never paid.

"Then, why do you laugh at what I do?" asked Alison, as if very deeply wounded.

"Alison," said her mother, pressing her daughter's shoulder firmly, "there is a great want—a great lack in you."

"I know it, mother," said Alison wearily, "a great many lacks. As you often tell me, I am fearfully hard and unsympathetic."

"Not as a rule, my dear; only on one

point; and I was hoping that——" began the widow, taking the corner of the window-seat opposite to the one her daughter occupied.

Alison felt what was coming; the impulse to flee was too strong to be resisted. She sprang up.

"I must go and look after Uncle John," she murmured.

But before she could get away, her mother had seized both of her small shapely hands. "Alison," she said, looking up into her daughter's burning face. Alison struggled to get free; then resolved to stay and brave the coming question. "Alison—tell me, dear"—anxiously. "I know you and he understand each other——"

"We don't," put in Alison miserably.

"But did Alec Carruthers formally propose on the wedding-day?" Mrs. Bayliss went on, ignoring Alison's interpolation.

"No, no! of course not! I should have

told you! Let me go, please! Oh, please let me go!"

"Ah, my dear, he loves you very deeply! He has a deep nature; he is shy. You should be a little kinder."

"Mother," said Alison, nerving herself to a desperate effort, "he has been here to-day."

"Here!—to-day! Then, where is he now?" cried Mrs. Bayliss with extreme horror.

"Away," said Alison Scotchly under her voice.

"Away! gone! What has happened? What have you done? Child, child, what have you done?"

"Nothing, mother."

"Do you mean to say you refused him?" Mrs. Bayliss could hardly utter the words.

"I mean to say he is what he will always be to me—Mac's cousin. Do let me go, mother!"

Mrs. Bayliss released her daughter's hands; her own fell limply by her side.

Alison walked to the door; but before it closed behind her a Parthian shot reached her.

"Alison! Alison! You've broken his heart—his heart and mine!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MOONLIGHT.

"You've broken his heart—his heart and mine!"

The Parthian shot struck her; breathless and trembling, she fled away to her own room, and there dropped on to a chair by her bed-side in utter amazement and dismay.

She was shocked, hurt, stunned; like a frightened child, who knows he has done great mischief, but cannot tell how fatal that mischief may be.

"Oh, what have I done? What have I done?" For some time this was all she could say. "I've hurt her! Hurt my mother! What am I to do? I *can't* hurt

people! I can't break their hearts! I can't do it! I shall have to break my own; that will be easier! Oh, what have I done? What have I done?"

She could think of nothing else. Beyond the Square, the golden crowns and pennants on the Tower grew dim, the purple bloom on the turrets faded away, lights gleamed here and there in the barrack windows; yet still her mind refused to do anything else but repeat again and again, "What have I done?"

It grew presently as dark as it would be that summer night. She heard footsteps on the stairs. She knew the house was shut up—that her mother had retired to her room in loneliness, to mourn over her shattered day-dream. It was horrible to make her suffer.

Alison buried her face in the pillows. She felt, as she heard her mother's door closed, that she must go to her mother and promise. "Promise? What can I promise?

Can I run after him when he has walked away in anger? Can I run after him and bring him back? No, no! Let him go! I wouldn't care one bit if it were not for mother, and—if he didn't care for me so much! I do so hate to hurt people!" But the gnawing of compunction that the sound of the closing of her mother's door had caused ceased after awhile. She did not rise and go to her; but the cool night air stole in through the open window, and somewhat calmed the fever of her mind.

She rose presently and looked up—looked out into the night. A nearly full moon stood above the north-west turret—the turret nearest her—the one to which she had seen the pigeons fly—the one the Princess of the Queen's House had pointed out as "the turret where Mr. Penrose worked."

How long ago it seemed since she had seen him! She had lived through so

much emotion since then; so much had been compressed into the few hours that had passed since the afternoon, that the music and the young man appeared far back in a remote past.

Alison felt weak and beaten, as if she had been very ill; but there was something in the cool moonlight and the night breeze so refreshing, something in that turret so fascinating, it seemed that health and strength were coming back again to her as she sat there watching the moonlight growing in brightness.

"The turret where he works!" It stood out dark and clear against the solemn sky; now and again coming apparently nearer, now and then retiring into dimness. "Where he *works!* 'Works'—and I will work too, now I'm free! I'll work upon myself!"

She did not put the thought actually into words, but the feeling was there. She was free; she would work and develop

whatever was worth developing in herself; she would not for ever grovel in that slough of abject ignorance Basil Penrose had revealed to her; she would struggle out of it into light and knowledge. The immediate future, incarnated in Mrs. Bayliss, might be terrible to live through; but Alison had already lived through many dreadful things; the distant future lay before her, and—did she sit there thinking or dreaming, or what name can one give to her vague, shadowy ambitions?—that distant, magical future, fitful as the moonlight, held her spell-bound.

There she sat until past midnight. She never went to the window until then; so she never saw Alec slowly pacing about the Square. He had gone then. How much had her thoughts been with him? Ah! that was just the question. How much? If he had only come to her during the dreary, empty days! But he had not come; and now the empty days had all

come to an end; now her mind was so full, there seemed in it no place for Alec; only she hoped she had not hurt him too much, not so deeply as her mother's words implied.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEAR FUTURE.

ALISON'S near future, as it appeared to her in the person of her mother, proved quite as disagreeable as she had feared it would be.

Mrs. Bayliss's face was at all times the barometer that indicated the state of the domestic weather in the little household of which she was the centre.

Even John Harbuckle's old bookkeeper, who rarely saw Mrs. Bayliss, knew the moment he met his employer in the morning whether the mistress of the house "set fair" or otherwise; but, unlike the barometer of common life, Mrs. Bayliss

herself created the atmospheric states her manner indicated.

For some days after Alison's outbreak of self-assertion, Mrs. Bayliss stood steadily at the lowest possible point to which she could run down; and she could, as every member of her household knew only too well, run down very low indeed.

During those terrible days she scarcely spoke; she sat for hours with a book or knitting in her hand, with an expression on her face that would have appalled the stoutest heart. During those days John Harbuckle sent out cheques without his signature, and did several other things so foolish that it was currently reported in the City that he was "breaking up."

The old bookkeeper was the only person who got any pleasure out of the situation; but this nefarious individual was very much tickled by it. A wicked but carefully suppressed twinkle, latent in his eye all day, sparkled out with great brilliancy as soon

as he returned to his wife, who was eagerly waiting for news. Thus it is, that in the strange conglomerate we call "this life," few things are either an unmixed good or an unqualified evil.

Hour after hour Mrs. Bayliss sat in her Bombay chair, the picture of unapproachableness, her colourless lashes nearly touching her colourless cheek, the corners of her lips severely depressed, the most uncompromising widow's cap she possessed rigidly set on her smooth, colourless hair. Oh, there were times when Mrs. Bayliss could be a very terrible person indeed! The two or three days that followed Alison's outbreak were such a time.

As for Alison's sufferings—but let them pass! Once, and once only, did she make a distinct advance towards conciliation.

"Mother, I am so—so grieved, so——" she faltered.

"Do not allude to the painful subject. It is all *my* fault. I ought to have known

that for me there could be no more pleasure in this world. After my great loss, I ought never to have expected happiness again. Say no more!"

Alison said no more; but this tone always touched the tenderest part of her heart. Her mother had suffered terribly, and she herself had suffered with her. Radical as were the differences of character between the two, Alison was bound to her mother, not only by ordinary filial affection, but by the strong tie of bitter loss endured together.

There was a grave beside the Birren Water by which they had wept, clasped in each other's arms, such tears as only heart-broken widow and fatherless daughter can weep; there was a home above that fast-rushing stream where together they had lived through unspeakable desolation and grinding poverty. It was horrible to have hurt her mother; the depression of those days was almost more than Alison

could bear. There were moments when she almost hated Alec Carruthers for having caused the misery.

And yet the strange part of the business was, there was a new spring of energy hard at work in Alison. Thrown entirely on her own resources, she somehow managed to do a great deal in those few days; in fact, she sometimes felt, although she was shocked at herself for her wickedness, a sort of wild happiness when she was alone.

The dreariness that had made her wander, wander, wander, in search of the lost girls was gone. The shrug of the shoulder at the Queen's House, that had revealed to her her inconceivable depths of ignorance, was now urging her on to go and do vigorous battle with her own deplorable lack of knowledge.

"About that song, now?" she asked herself for the hundredth time one morning as she was dressing—"about that song of

Madame Herzog's, that I thought so beautiful? Why was it bad? Why was it wicked of her and of me to like it? Why was my admiration of it too low a thing for Basil Penrose"—she already called him to herself "Basil Penrose"—"to discuss at all? And yet I'm sure I thought it was lovely, and what's more, I think so still."

She turned these questions over and over as she dressed. It was wonderful; they seemed now to open up in dim vision, worlds the existence of which she had before hardly suspected. She had heard music before—the best music, the greatest singers and instrumentalists; but she had never heard anything that had so opened her eyes as those few words of Basil Penrose's had done.

Yes, after much groping, what he meant had evidently something to do with that very puzzling and mysterious expression which she had met with frequently, but had never been able to grasp

—the Perfect Whole. She began to have a glimmering of what was wrong with that song.

"Ah, I see!" she exclaimed at last. "It was scrappy! That's what he meant. But if that song were scrappy, how scrappy I must be! Mother's quite right; there's a terrible lack in me! I'm all odds and ends, and bits of things. I'm not one idea well carried out!" And here poor Alison began to flounder hopelessly in a semi-metaphysical bog, out of which she was presently drawn by the arrival of a note from the newly wedded pair, Mac and Jessie Carruthers.

Now, newly married couples, if of the right sort—that is, young, happy, and desperately in love—have a style of writing to their very most intimate relations quite their own. One might call it the double-barrelled style.

Here is the precious specimen of this sort of effusion Alison read a few mornings

after the eventful day at the Tower. I ought, perhaps, to apologize for incorporating such arrant rubbish into my sober narrative; but the astonishing avidity with which not only the maiden Alison, but her widowed mother (who immediately became sweetness itself), and her old bachelor uncle, who had loved and lost many years ago, not only devoured the letter, but made it the subject of ever-recurring observations, leads me to suspect there must have been more in its hastily scrawled and blotted lines than meets my own inexperienced eye.

"Wilareux, Pas de Calais.

"My dearest Alison [originally in Jessie's hand, a heavy line drawn through "my," and "our" substituted by Mac; sundry unmeaning strokes with the pen, and a couple of blots, mute evidences of a skirmish. Later in the day, Mrs. Bayliss was actually weak enough to make the place still worse by dropping

a big tear there. I beg you to observe the sentimental folly of people about this kind of thing.]

"You will be surprised to find that we have not reached Paris yet." ["It's entirely Jessie's fault," wrote Mac. "I think, Alison, you ought to have told me that Jessie wedded her own way long before she married me—a bigamist, in fact. I shall at once institute proceedings."] ["Don't believe a word of what Mac writes. The fact is, we went out in a boat yesterday, and Mac caught a fish; it was horrible to taste—poisonous, I believe; but he would have it cooked, he was so proud of it. So now he is like a young tiger that has tasted human blood; he wants to fish every day; so expect to hear——"] ["I've just been out to order a coroner's inquest for two. Jessie, will you go on properly, or must I take the whole thing out of your hands? Oh, if I'd have known you were going to treat me like

this, I'd never have trusted myself abroad with you, unprotected by Alison!"] ["The old Frenchwoman"—in Jessie's hand—"who does for us makes the most delicious soup; Mac calls it golden soup, on account of its colour. She has taught me how to make it, and also how to cook *au petit petit feu*, that is, with dried coffee grounds, etc., a fine economical wrinkle! I found this heavenly place, which is almost in the sea, all by myself."] ["Oh, Jessie! Call yourself a truthful girl! Believe me, Alison, I just dreamed about this place, and then we strolled out from the hotel, and went straight up to the very spot. But that's like her; she never gives me credit for anything except for ador——" The end of this word was lost in a chaos of smudge. "But——"

But I think I have given you quite enough of this sort of stuff. Yet through what smiles and tears it was read!

Is this more interesting than discussions

on the Perfect Whole; or is it the Perfect Whole? or what is it? At any rate, the cloud that had hung over the household fled before it.

Alison laughed once more freely, and felt rather curious in an undefined sort of way.

"How happy they are, those two! They can play together. Alec and I could never have done that. But could I play with any one? No, I really couldn't stand it!" she said to herself. "I wonder how much I have hurt that poor fellow?" she went on with some compunction, not untouched by that sense of having made a fool of herself that, more or less, was always hanging over her.

"The dear young things!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss with sentiment, taking up the note for the third or fourth time, and very obviously shooting her remark at the neat brown head of her unreasonable daughter.

Poor Alison! after all, and in spite of

the alteration in her mother's temper, the long day before her seemed at best but a doleful prospect just then. Dear, good Uncle John, however, was so relieved by his sister's change of countenance all of a sudden, that he became quite equal to the occasion.

"My dear," he said to his sister, "if Alison is not particularly busy to-day, I should be very much obliged if she would go to the Guildhall Library and verify a few references for my friend Bainbridge, who, I am sorry to hear, is laid up with a sprained knee at Maanturog, and can't get the books he wants. Alison, if you can't find them at Guildhall or the London Institution, I think you will be sure to manage them at the British Museum."

Alison was only too glad of an excuse for getting away from home. It was two or three days before she had completed her list.

"Thank you, my dear," said Uncle John,

when at last she showed it him. "So you have found them all, have you, and put them all right? I am very much obliged to you; you do that kind of work very well and very thoroughly. Your stitching and machining for Jessie doesn't seem to have injured your literary touch. These little remarks of your own are excellent; they have a sort of flavour about them that I am sure my good old friend——"

"John! How can you stuff the girl's head full of such nonsense? Alison—well, she may write, but she'll never be read; never!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss with a great deal of acrimony. But how much less terrible was her acrimony than her late silence!

"My dear Mary, her style is charming!" cried John Harbuckle, with an enthusiasm that was almost defiant.

"To bookworms, perhaps! Where is her human interest?"

"My human interest!" cried Alison. "Why, mother, I take an interest in everything that is human!"

"Do you? Well, all I can say is, you don't succeed in putting it on paper, that's all. If you had to gain your bread by your pen you'd die of starvation. I wish you'd give up folly, and become a reasonable being."

Mrs. Bayliss had had a good many solitary hours in which to reflect further on the loss of Alec Carruthers while her foolish daughter had been looking up those references. Things were still not altogether pleasant for any one in that Early Georgian house on Tower Hill.

One evening, perhaps a fortnight or so after Alison's visit to the Tower, as they were finishing dinner, John Harbuckle observed very cautiously and tentatively, nicely balancing his regard for his sister's wounded feelings with his wish to say what he pleased at his own table—

"Let me see, Alison, you were at the Tower some little time ago, weren't you? Did you happen to hear any one mention a young man of the name of Penrose?"

"He was at the Queen's House," said Alison.

Her mother slightly raised her eyes to her daughter, who with her usual undisguised folly coloured furiously, and immediately wished herself at Jericho.

"A very remarkable young man! Indeed, a most remarkable young man!" continued John Harbuckle, who, dear, innocent gentleman! believed firmly that no man who was not an antiquary, and over forty, could have the slightest charm for Alison. "A most interesting and intelligent young man! He is making experiments in one of the turrets of the White Tower."

"I heard he was at work there," said Alison as calmly as she could, dipping a strawberry in sugar as she spoke, and

wishing some one would dip *her* down into the lowest depths of the sea, out of her mother's sight.

"This afternoon," John Harbuckle went on—guilelessly, dear creature—"I had to go over to the Tower stores on business, and there I happened to meet young Merriman. We stood chatting for a few minutes as we watched the men at work on the foundations of the old guard-room they have recently demolished, and where, as you know, Alison, they have come upon so much undoubted Roman work, that "Cæsar's Tower" can now no longer be regarded as a myth. Merriman, who is, I find, a better-informed young fellow than I gave him credit for being, told me about Penrose. He grew quite excited about him, and he had just offered to take me to see the young man at his work, when Penrose himself came out of the Salt Tower—the newly rebuilt one, nearest Iron-gate Wharf, you know, Mary. So I

got into conversation with Merriman's friend. He is really a very remarkable young man!"

"Your young men always are, John," said Mrs. Bayliss. "It is a peculiarity of the whole tribe, until you find out that they have robbed you, or forged your name, or are returned convicts."

"This one is really a very—by-the-by, Mary,"—and John Harbuckle began to hesitate, for he was still afraid of his sister's mood—"in fact, I expect him here presently."

Now, Mrs. Bayliss had never yet liked any young man in whom her brother took an interest. John Harbuckle took an interest in a great many young men, but they were never of the kind Mrs. Bayliss cared to have introduced to her daughter; they were as a rule not quite on a level, socially, with Alec Carruthers of Muirhead. They were generally of the kind who needed a helping hand—in fact, poor.

"What name did you say?" asked she, with that little extra stiffness in her tone her brother, by this time, so well knew how to interpret, and from which he instinctively shrank.

"A—a—Penrose, Basil Penrose," said John Harbuckle.

"And who do you say he is?" asked his sister.

"Well, my dear, I've told you all I know; hadn't we better send over for young Merriman? No doubt, he will be able to tell us all about his friend," suggested John Harbuckle drily. "But now I come to think of it, he'll just be going to mess; and here is Alison to give us the necessary information. She saw him, she says, at the Queen's House; she can describe him better than I can. What was he like?"

"Well, he wasn't at all like the Guards," said Alison, feeling that she spoke of him with an effort. "He's a civilian——"

"In *our* sense of the term? Do you

mean a civil servant?" interpolated Mrs. Bayliss.

"No; I only mean not a soldier," returned Alison; "and he plays the piano very well."

"I don't know how it is," said Mrs. Bayliss with an extremely superior air, "but I have always had a certain contempt for men who play the piano. Dear James always despised them."

"But if they do it very well?" Alison ventured to put in.

"Oh, I like to hear the music, of course; but, I don't know, there's something about it—about the fact that it's played by a man, that I can't quite get over. I suppose it strikes me as unmanly."

"Killing things being the only thoroughly manly occupation extant," said John Harbuckle, as if finishing his sister's sentence. "Mary, those strawberries are most excellent; I'll trouble you again."

Mary served him without a word; but

again the depressed corners of her mouth, and a lowering of her eyelids until the colourless lashes nearly touched her cheek, told that she was very distinctly out of temper.

There was what my old music-master used to call "a speaking silence," which presently became very irksome, until it was at length broken by the announcement, "Please, sir, there's a young man of the name of Penrose wants to see you."

"Show him into the drawing-room," said John Harbuckle. "I'll be with him directly."

"He hasn't been slow in following up his introduction," observed Mrs. Bayliss grimly.

"Well, he's not making a call; he has only come to look at some of my old broken furniture and things. He has offered to mend that Empire side-board that was poor Arthur's."

So saying, the old bachelor was leaving,

when his sister said, under her voice, "I suppose I may see him?"

"Oh, of course, of course," and, accompanied by his sister and Alison, he went into the drawing-room, where they found "the young man of the name of Penrose," and ceased to wonder that Sarah Jane had hesitated about showing him upstairs, as she might easily have mistaken him for a superfine edition of the British Workman.

He wore neither collar nor tie, and tools were sticking out of all his pockets. He was, however, already hard at work examining John Harbuckle's specimens of *vieux cloisonné*.

"I didn't know I was to have the pleasure of meeting ladies!" he exclaimed, as Mrs. Bayliss and her brother entered, setting down a bowl he had been scrutinizing.

The unmistakably educated voice and articulation were not thrown away upon the widow; but there was something about the young man that struck her at once and

as plainly that he was dangerous, as if he had had that word "writ large" on his forehead. She bowed, rather stiffly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Penrose, as he suddenly recognized Alison. "The lady of the red, red roses! I didn't know you lived here!"

"Yes, I do live here," said Alison; and terribly conscious as she was that her mother was watching her, she yet managed to shake hands with Penrose quite properly; something in his manner telling her that he would not be satisfied with a mere bow, as it was evident he considered her as an old acquaintance.

Was there a touch of genuine pleasure in his exclamation when he recognized her? Ah, this was a question Alison was doomed to ask herself many a time and oft! Did she ever obtain a distinct answer? Was she ever sure? It is certain, however, that his tone gave her the impression that he was pleased to meet her again, and to meet her so near the Tower.

"Well, Mr. Harbuckle, we had better get to work while the light lasts," said Penrose, turning to the old bachelor.

"By all means," assented John Harbuckle, making a step towards the door.

"Oh, but I say!" exclaimed Penrose fervently, stopping close by Alison's chair, and looking down at her. "That was indeed a criminal song that woman sang the other day! The more I think of it, the more I'm appalled by its criminality."

He was gone before Alison could sufficiently command herself to think of a reply.

"Not like the Guards! I should think not! Why, he's the very image of Judas Iscariot!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss with horror, the instant the door was closed upon the two men.

"Did you ever see Judas Iscariot, mother?" asked Alison, with that curious little mixture of nervousness and humour that was so peculiarly her own.

"Don't talk nonsense! you know perfectly well what I mean," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"But, mother, Judas Iscariot had red hair; now, this one's is quite dark," said Alison quite wickedly.

"I don't like him, and I never shall like him," said Mrs. Bayliss with decision.

"Well, he very soon took himself off, didn't he?" said Alison, who was perfectly delighted that she had seen him again.

"Humph! he hasn't gone yet," thought the mother; but she judged it prudent to keep her thoughts to herself. She was shocked to observe Alison's interest in him. And there she sat knitting for a good hour and a half, all the while thinking of that young man called Penrose, amplifying, and amplifying, and amplifying the very, very slight knowledge she had of him, until she had spun around him a considerable web of mystery, suspicion, and dislike. There was something foreign about him, she was sure; what was it? Something in

the colour of his eyes, in the oriental dip of his long nose; and Mrs. Bayliss disliked foreigners. Then the idea of his going about disguised as a British Workman!

"I wish John wouldn't bring young men to this house without knowing all about them and their people!" she said to herself a good many times that evening; but never a word did she utter. "John is really very trying; he is so absurdly Quixotic!"

Alison sat quietly knitting also. She too found herself asking herself all sorts of questions about the young man of the name of Penrose; but the one she wished most to have answered was: "Was he really glad to see me?"

There must have been something very interesting about that young man, or all these people, and perhaps a great many others, would not have been thinking so much about him just then; certainly, no one could accuse him of being commonplace, whatever his other failings may have been.

It was nearly dark, the Argand burners were just being lighted, when Alison again heard that voice, so vividly like its owner that "picturesque" is the only word that described it.

"Where is the lady of the red, red roses?" she heard it ask. "Because, if she is anywhere near, I should like, before I go, just to demonstrate to her the absolute shockingness and criminality of that woman's song we heard at the Tower the other day."

There was something that struck that whimsical chord which, though a good deal hidden in the recesses of Alison's nature, was at all times singularly responsive—struck it so forcibly that, as the young man named Penrose came in, she laughed merrily—

"What! at it again, Mr. Penrose? Your brain must have a fine repeating action."

"Rather!" said he, letting his graceful figure down on to the cushioned settle of

the open window opposite Alison, who was in the other corner.

"'Rather!' Good gracious! he must be American! I hate Americans!" thought Mrs. Bayliss.

"Well, now, I'm going to demonstrate," said the young man with the bright brown velvet eyes—those same eyes twinkling just then with an additional brilliancy. And he *did* demonstrate, for about an hour.

Uncle John was delighted to hear him talk. Mrs. Bayliss did not know what to make of him. As for Alison, she felt that she had never heard any one talk before. It was all new to her—oh, delightfully fresh and new! He quite convinced her of the enormity, the criminality, the injury to art, science, and morals involved in that woman's song. And she had thought it beautiful! Oh, in what an abyss of outer darkness must her life have been spent before she had met that marvellous

interpreter of all things—the young man of the name of Penrose!

"I see! I see!" she cried with a delight that not the presence of all the mothers in the universe could have checked, before he had gone very far with his demonstration. "Yes, I see exactly what you mean; you've made it quite clear to me!"

She smiled all over her face, as she always did when she had caught an idea she had been eagerly rushing after.

He did not smile. He looked very grave, and went on demonstrating.

"Do I *quite* like to see him there talking to my niece?" thought John Harbuckle, as he watched Alison's keen interest in what Basil Penrose was saying, sharpening every sensitive line of her face. "His mother could not have been English. I am curious to know something of the family history of that very remarkable young man. He is an undoubted example

of a mixed race. The nose is Semitic, but not quite Jewish; I should hardly think he belonged to the People. An interesting young man—very! Have I done right in bringing him here? I never before saw so obstinate a chin. But how wonderfully he has mended my Empire side-board! His manipulation was delightful to watch!"

CHAPTER X.

HER MOTHER'S ANTIPATHY.

GREAT indeed was the indignation of Alison's mother when Basil Penrose appeared upon the scene; greater still her dismay at her daughter's undisguised interest in that young man.

From the first, and entirely as a personal affair, apart altogether from Alison, the widow disliked Basil Penrose vehemently. He belonged to that class of human beings to whom few persons can be indifferent; who compel their fellow-creatures either to love or hate them desperately.

Mrs. Bayliss at once hated him. She did not understand him, and those she did not understand were abhorrent to her.

That she should not understand him was, perhaps, not singular; he was a mystery to a good many people besides Mrs. Bayliss. There are, however, several ways in which a mystery may be treated: it may be reverently adored; it may be thought not worth exploring; it may be considered more or less a humbug; or one may hesitate before committing one's self to any definite opinion about it.

As for Alison, to her Basil Penrose was a most interesting human enigma, that appealed very strongly to her curiosity and to her love of romance, as well as to her love of knowledge.

To John Harbuckle he presented all the attraction of a specimen he had not yet been able to classify; while to his sister, he was a mystery of iniquity, which it was her duty, on her daughter's behalf, to hunt down if possible.

Mrs. Bayliss, like most of us, not only hated those she failed to understand, but

invariably mistrusted them; unless they were accompanied by a warrant of respectability in the shape of general acceptance by persons in good and definite positions, in which case she accepted them in faith.

"That is what I so much like in Alec Carruthers," she said to herself, when mentally trying to unravel the mystery she herself had spun around Basil Penrose. "That's what I like about Alec and Mac; you know exactly who they are, and what they are. They have a definite status. They belong to a county; you can find their people among the landed gentry. But now, what do we know about this Basil Penrose? Why, absolutely nothing, although he talked last night right off for a whole hour!"

She made some such remark as this last to her brother, after she had, unaided, threshed the subject pretty finely.

"Well, Mary," returned her brother, "*I*

seem to know a good deal about him. He is an original genius, that's what he is, and, certainly, the most intelligent young man that ever came into this house."

"But he never said one word about his people!" exclaimed Mary, as if personally insulted by the omission.

"Perhaps he hasn't any," suggested John Harbuckle.

"Rubbish! Of course he has—*or ought to have.*"

"Well, I've promised to go over to the Tower to-morrow afternoon, to see his laboratory," said John Harbuckle.

"Laboratory indeed! As if he were a real Professor, like Professor Calderwood, whom poor James used to know. What's he trying to do? He never told us anything about it. Why didn't he?"

"Probably he thought you would not be interested in purely technical work. The fact is, Mary," said John, dropping his voice, "he is engaged in making a series of

experiments that may lead to most valuable, or, rather, invaluable results. You know how the telephone transmits sound. Well, Basil Penrose is trying to discover how to transmit sight, or, I should say, what you see."

"Can't be done!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss shortly.

"I beg your pardon," said John Harbuckle; "Penrose convinced me last night that it was quite possible; indeed, on a very minute scale, it has already been done."

"Well, of course I can't say anything on such abstruse subjects; but then, he doesn't seem to be working for the Government, or even for any society. Now, Professor Calderwood, James's great friend, you know, used to work for the Government. One can understand that: that gives a man a definite status; one knows what he is."

"To me there's something very interest-

ing in private research," put in John Harbuckle. "The young man seems to me a heaven-born experimentalist."

"Heaven-born!" laughed Mary unpleasantly. "I should think he came from quite the other place. Why, he's *exactly — exactly*, my dear, like Judas Iscariot! I'd give a good deal to know who his parents are; but you may depend upon it, there is something very curious about them."

"At any rate, Mary, he seems to have aroused your interest, as he certainly has aroused mine."

"But don't bring him here, John! Now, do let me impress upon you *not* to bring him here! Go to his turret, or whatever it is, as often as you like; only, never bring him here again!"

"But very probably he'll come. He is sure to come if he wishes to do so; and really, Mary, I'm not prepared to say that I'll forbid him the house. That would be

very bad policy—if—if you are thinking of Alison."

"Then I shall have to send Alison away; that's what it will come to! If you have so little regard for your niece's welfare that you don't mind whom you introduce to her——"

"They met at the Queen's House; surely you don't hold me responsible for that?"

"That would have been nothing. However, if you forget your duty as an uncle, I must redouble my care as a mother!"

"You are annoyed about the Carruthers affair, my dear, and, consequently, hardly just. Well, I'm sorry for that poor young fellow, Alec Carruthers; but he wasn't at all up to Alison's standard. She couldn't have been happy with him. He never interested me—nor her. Depend upon it, she knows what is best for herself."

"I'm not at all certain of that! Even you, John, must have noticed how engrossed she was last night in——"

"An intelligent interest, my dear, that's all; merely an intelligent——"

"Intelligent fiddlesticks! I've been a girl myself, and that you never were!"

"Well, well, Mary," said John Harbuckle, with a hearty laugh quite unusual for him, "I don't say I ever was! But you needn't alarm yourself about young Penrose. His mind is absolutely taken up with his experiments. He has no time for love-making, and I don't think that sort of thing is much in Alison's way either. Be comforted, Mary; and mind you don't put ideas into their heads, and then you won't find them there."

"I want to know how he comes to be at the Tower," said Mary, with a scowl.

"Oh, there's no mystery about that! General Howson, of the last regiment that was quartered there, is a scientific man, and managed it for him. Merriman found him at the Tower when the Guards came."

"That's just what I suspected! I should

like to know where General Howson came across him. Howson is another man like you, John; an enthusiastic, who's always picking some extraordinary jewel out of the gutter!"

"My dear Mary! You surely can't imagine that a man of Penrose's address and solid knowledge ever lived in a gutter! No, that's going a little too far."

"I only know I wish he had never come here!" sighed Mrs. Bayliss. "I feel he's going to worry the life out of me; and, unfortunately, my presentiments always come true. He'll turn out, like most of your wonderful young men, to be a mere adventurer—a plausible one, I admit; you'll see! I'm seldom wrong in these matters."

"Time will show. I feel sure, however, you are mistaken this time. I have promised to go over this afternoon, to see his work; so I must get to business now, for I shall have to leave off earlier than usual."

The result of this conversation was, that Mrs. Bayliss resolved to go over to the Tower as early as possible, and call upon every one she knew there, with a view to finding out as much about Mr. Penrose as she could; so having carefully started her daughter off to Kensington, to match some trifling thing in knitting-yarns for her, over to the Tower she went.

Unfortunately for her, every one she knew there was out; but, as Mrs. Bayliss was a woman who clung to her ideas with the fondest pertinacity, instead of returning immediately, she took up a position on one of the seats under the limes on the Green, and waited there for what might happen.

It was a quiet, drowsy summer afternoon; the trees and her black satin sunshade afforded a pleasant shelter; the gentle fluttering of the leaves and of their transparent shadows made a soft "eye-music," while the presence of soldiers

here and there, the feeling that she was again in a garrison, had a great charm for Captain Bayliss's widow. She was quieted, soothed, lulled; her thoughts grew restful, deliciously lazy, her eyes closed. Was she at Woolwich with her James, once again; or was it Malta, Gib, or——

She awoke with a start, and a sharp pain in her foot. One of the ravens, that a few minutes before had been dozing in the sun on the back of the chair, had awakened to a sense of intrusion, had come down, and nipped her toe; while his companion was graciously allowing his head to be stroked by a small child belonging to a party of visitors; so capricious are these creatures.

"Shoo-shoo-shoo! You horrible bird!" Mrs. Bayliss cried, poking at him with her sunshade.

He retired precipitously, with a curious mincing gait, his great shining wings outstretched and glossy in the sunshine.

Mrs. Bayliss could not again compose herself to a nap after this interruption. A warder in his Beef-eater costume, with his many little bows of red, white, and blue stuck around the band of his low-crowned hat, was standing near the movable bar of the *chevaux de frise* that keeps the visitors to the Beauchamp Tower from intruding on the private part of the Green. Although on duty, he appeared to have nothing particular to do just then, beyond amusing a party of Blue-coat boys, who are at all times free of the Tower, and he was within speaking distance. With this warder, then, Mrs. Bayliss got into conversation; asked him what regiment he had been in, under whom he had served, and so on.

The man seemed glad to talk, glad to meet a lady who had known his old general, and who evidently took a lively interest in military matters.

Presently came the question up to which Mrs. Bayliss had been leading.

"Do you happen to know a Mr. Penrose —he lives somewhere in the Tower, I believe?" she asked rather vaguely.

"Know him? I should think so, ma'am. He lodges with one of the warders. He's a masterpiece, he is!"

"Indeed! With which warder does he live?"

"With the warder who lives in the Salt Tower, ma'am. The Salt Tower's the one nighest the Docks."

"I understood he was at work, that he had a laboratory, or something of the kind, in one of the turrets up there," said Mrs. Bayliss, slightly raising her sunshade in the direction she indicated.

"Bless you, ma'am, he's all over the place!" exclaimed the warder. "But there's a party wanting me," and he made a step as if to leave her.

"Perhaps you'll come back again when you are at liberty?" said Mrs. Bayliss, in a tone suggestive of a possible shilling.

The man raised his hand with a military salute, and a minute later departed with the visitors.

"All over the place, is he! Well, I don't want him to catch me here!" thought Mrs. Bayliss. But almost before she could congratulate herself on the information she hoped to derive from the warder, the tall, pliant figure of the young man of the name of Penrose came rapidly from the side of the Armoury opposite, crossed the Green, in front of Mrs. Bayliss, and entered the Queen's House.

Mrs. Bayliss, by discreet management of her sunshade, obtained an excellent view of the object of her animosity, without letting him see her own face.

Yes, more than ever she was convinced that young man was dangerous. But why? He was not handsome; certainly not in her eyes. He was as unlike the late James, or the more recent Major Merriman, as possible; although, even

she could not deny the swift grace with which he had crossed before her; even she could not help feeling the strong and eager vitality in movement, face, and form. His clothes were well-cut, too, and Mrs. Bayliss always had an eye for a well-cut coat. They were far from new, truly; the pockets were bulgy, and seemed stuffed full. He had a large packet in his hand, no collar or tie; but he looked not only like a gentleman, but like a man of distinction. Now, who was he? Why was he dangerous? Mrs. Bayliss argued these questions with herself until the warder returned.

"As I were a-saying, ma'am," he resumed, "that Mr. Penrose he is everywhere; all over the place, like. He've got a room in the Salt Tower, where he lives; then he's in and out of the Queen's House, constant, going to the Bell Tower, which you have to go through the Queen's House to get to it; that's it, where the sentry's a-standing; it's the Guv'nor's."

"And what does he do in the Bell Tower?" asked Mrs. Bayliss.

"The Strong Room in the Bell Tower. Cardinal Fisher was imprisoned there, time of Henry the Eighth. He was beheaded on Tower Hill," replied the warder, dropping into his professional patter. "Mr. Penrose," he went on, as if exhibiting that young man as part of the show—"Mr. Penrose have a lathe there, and does turning, and makes tools; and they do say he's inventing a machine."

"Oh, and he lodges with a friend of yours, does he?"

"Yes, ma'am; and a handy young gentleman to have for a lodger he is, I'm told. Don't give no trouble, and the finest tinker I ever came across; for he's friendly, and not above helping all round; seems to have the gift for tinkering, natural like! Beats the natives out in India, and they're clever."

"A tinker! What does he tinker?"

"Why, anything he can lay hands on,

ma'am! There ain't a broken saucepan or bit of crockery in my friend's place, but blest if he don't mend it! As my wife says, it's a gift. That's just it; it's a gift!"

"And what does he do up in the turret? —By-the-by, which turret is it?"

"Why, this one nighest us, up there where them pigeons is flying in and out. The round one is where the daughter of Baron Fitzwalter was pizened, by giving of her a pizened egg, by order of King John, and is now filled up by the works of the clock," said the warder, pointing upwards, "and was where Flamstead, the Astronomer Royal, time of Charles the Second, used to work, and is still called the Observatory; but Mr. Penrose's observatory is this one, where the pigeons have got nesties. He works up there. I went up and see him one day, up there; leastways, I couldn't very well see, because all the windows was blocked up, all except one slit; and there he was a-standing, with one ray of light a-streaming

down on some crishstals and stones what he was operating upon. Thinks I, 'Well, you do look like an old wizard in a picture, an' no mistake; and it's a good job for you Queen Victoria owns this Tower, and not Queen Elizabeth, or they'd have burnt you, sure enough'—like they did the witch on this very spot where we're now a-talking on. He gave me quite a turn, he did; although you may think, ma'am, that living here, and being used to hearing footsteps coming up and downstairs all night, in my own Tower, it isn't a little that takes me aback. He tried to make me understand what he was after. It appeared as how he were trying to find a way of letting you see what people was a-doing of when they thought they was out of sight, all unbeknown to them. 'Which,' says I, 'you'll excuse me, sir; but, speaking as a married man, it seems to me like an invention what is open to objection, and likely to cause unpleasantness between parties,' says I."

"Where does he come from—do you know?" asked Mrs. Bayliss abruptly, crushing a smile as she spoke.

"General Howson, of the Line regiment that was here in April, introduced him. That's all I know," replied the man.

"Has he parents, brothers, sisters, any one belonging to him? Do they ever come and see him?"

The man shook his head. "You'll excuse me, ma'am," he said, with another military salute, "but there's a party for the church, where those that were beheaded here are buried."

"Thank you very much," said Mrs. Bayliss, inserting a florin into the warder's hand. "Thank you very much!"

"Quite welcome," returned the man, and withdrew to conduct his party over St. Peter's ad Vincula, the little church on the Green.

"It is as I thought," said Mrs. Bayliss; "no one knows the antecedents of that

young man! And when a young man does not talk freely about his people, depend upon it there's a screw loose somewhere!" And turning her sunshade so as to screen her from those sharp eyes that she felt must see through any thickness of stone wall, Mrs. Bayliss left the Tower Green, and returned home with such information as she had picked up.

She kept her own counsel about that afternoon's visit. She was unusually taciturn during the rest of the day, brooding over the mystery of Basil Penrose.

Mrs. Bayliss was a woman in whom love and hate were singularly powerful and tenacious. She had loved her James—who was, after all, not of much account, except as a husband—with the whole strength of her being. She had mourned for him with an unreasoning intensity of grief, that would have made her sit by his grave and starve, had it not been that in so doing she must also have starved his daughter

and niece, "the girls" he had left her as a sacred charge. This was how she had loved.

She was capable of an antipathy as strong as her love. She had been smitten by James Bayliss, at once and for ever. She had recognized him as her man the moment her eyes had rested upon him, in a room facing Woolwich Common. So had she at once recognized in Basil Penrose her antipathy. It was an antipathy as personal as her love; had there been no Alison to protect, she would still have felt the same antagonism.

But he was strong, that young man of the name of Penrose—very strong; stronger than any man she had yet had to deal with! She had no means of gauging such a character as his; but she instinctively felt it possessed power she hated—dreaded, yet could hardly cope with. Was he a man born to be king—a wizard, a Mephistopheles, an inquisitor?

"I could believe Basil Penrose was inspired by the devil! He's the very facsimile of Judas Iscariot!" thought Mrs. Bayliss that evening, as, from her crimson-cushioned window-seat at John Harbuckle's, she looked across Trinity Square to the north-east turret of the White Tower, where the crowns and pennants of the vanes burned in the sunset like molten gold, and Sir Christopher's Wren's lead roofs bloomed against the evening sky like just-ripe damsons.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NORTH-WEST TURRET.

Most intelligent visitors to the Tower of London have felt, as they stood on the Green, or on the Parade Ground, gazing up at the White Tower, how completely, in the days of old, that great central fortress must have been shut off from the outer world.

Standing at its base, one can still see nothing, except the sky, that is not comprehended in the term, "The Tower." Church, barracks, dwellings, all are "The Tower;" it is as if the Tower were all the world—as if London did not exist.

Sit for ten minutes in the shade of that ancient prison lodging, the Beauchamp

Tower; remember the Moat, the double line of walls, the bastions, the massive gates, the heavy portcullis. You have passed all these; let them, and what you see around you, sink deep into your mind, if you would realize the armed isolation which the conquerors of England found necessary for their protection.

When you have done this to your heart's content—as you can under the new arrangements—enter the White Tower, go up the old stairs, where they found the bodies of the young Princes; pass through that wonderful relic of Norman ecclesiastical architecture, the massive Chapel of St. John, where St. Anselm of Le Bec and Canterbury, or his most dearly loved friend and brother monk, Gundulf of Rochester, may have celebrated Mass in the days of the Red King; pass into the cool Armouries on the first story; there look out of Christopher Wren's windows. From them you will see, to the west, the top of the

dome of St. Paul's, and the huge, aggressive roof of Cannon Street Station, rising beyond the quaint red tiles and gables of the Tudor houses on the Green; to the east the top-masts in the hidden Docks, apparently invading the land, among the gigantic warehouses.

Ascend, again, to the upper story, to Queen Elizabeth's Armoury, just newly set out with the effigies of armed knights and horses removed from that sham Gothic gallery, where for so many years they were the delight of thousands of sight-seers; glance at our venerable and well-remembered friends, the block, axe, and mask; pay your respects to Queen Elizabeth's Grace, who, in ruff and pearls, is still going on horseback to St. Paul's, and still almost as great an object of interest to the British public as if the Spanish Armada had been defeated only yesterday; overhear (you can hardly avoid it) some scrap of history, such as this:—

"Well, I don't call her so out-of-the-way good-looking, now, do you?"

"No, she weren't! That's why she had Mary Queen of Scots' head cut off, because Mary were a handsomer woman than she were. Jealousy, jealousy!"

Look, again, out of the windows; you will find that you have been gradually *rising into London.* There are the Thames, the Bridge, the Cathedral, the Station, the Docks, the crowd of buildings; there you will see—and even if you know London well, it will come to you, if you have not noticed it before, as a surprise—you will see that the White Tower, which once guarded the extreme east of a little walled town, now rises almost in the centre of a vast and ever-growing city.

Queen Elizabeth's Armoury is as high as the general public is permitted to ascend; but I have obtained special permission to ask you to accompany John Harbuckle on to the leads of the roof,

and to Basil Penrose's turret at the north-east angle.

John Harbuckle's appointment with Penrose was for three o'clock. As he turned to ascend the stairs of the White Tower, the two great clock faces on the only round turret, where, in Charles the Second's time, Flamstead the Astronomer used to work—those two great round clock faces, that always struck the old bachelor as a pair of eyes belonging to some gigantic and grotesque owl—indicated the precise time agreed upon.

In the cool Armoury, as he walked between the tall walls, brown with rifle-stocks, he heard a quick step, and, looking up, saw Basil Penrose advancing towards him.

Unable to discourse freely at home about his visit, John Harbuckle, who had the eye of a connoisseur, unburdened his mind to his old crony, Thomas Woolcomb, thus :—

"The effect was peculiarly pleasing to

me," he said. "If your son, the artist, should be thinking of making a study in brown, he could hardly do better than choose such a scene. The sunshine went past the deep embrasures of the windows without entering them; the dark brown of the rifle-stocks, the paler tones of the leather, the blue steel, and the picturesque form of this singular young man, also in brown, made an impression on my mind to which I find myself often reverting."

But John Harbuckle, with characteristic self-forgetfulness, omitted from the canvas the somewhat bent figure of an elderly man, with a kindly face, and shrewd, all-observant blue eyes.

"How are you, Mr. Harbuckle? I'm glad you have come," said Penrose eagerly, shaking hands as they met.

"I thank you. Have you, then, been obtaining results of more than ordinary interest?" asked John Harbuckle.

"I shall have something to show you,"

said Penrose, drawing back the thick red curtain that is always carefully guarded by attendants.

Beyond this curtain they came to the old stone stairs, built in the immense thickness of the wall. The stairs are now cased in wood for preservation, and wind round and round a newel of the same well-wrought masonry as the columns of St. John's Chapel, and, like those columns, have been freshly scraped, and otherwise "restored."

After a few minutes' climbing up the steep stairs, John Harbuckle and his guide came out into the open, by the side of the round clock turret, and so on to the leads, which, under a summer sun, presented a singularly arid, whitish appearance.

"A glorious view! Four glorious views!" exclaimed John Harbuckle, looking around him. "Although I live so near, it is many a long year since I was on these leads," he went on, turning, as if

by instinct, in the direction of his own home, and the white Trinity House, embedded among the trees of the Square and of the Tower Gardens—that little heart of verdure, clustering under the grey old walls of the Tower, in the very centre of the vast London all around; the only verdure to be seen from that height between the Tower and the filmy green of Shooter's Hill, far away, beyond eight crowded miles of river and shipping.

"An unrivalled view!" said John Harbuckle, with an expression of intense affection and admiration.

"I like it!" said Penrose. "It's big! I like big things; and, besides, you are higher up here than most people, without being altogether separated from them. When I see mankind from St. Paul's, or the Monument, men appear such absurd midgets that I am ashamed of being a man myself; but up here I get a fine idea of the work of the world, and yet I'm above

it all the time. That suits me! I don't feel ashamed of being a man when I'm up here."

He paused; the noise, the clash, the whirr of the busy life below, came up in a thousand varying sounds. The two men stood still, looking over the battlements of the roof of the White Tower at the great basins of the Docks, spread out down below as in a picture.

"Very fine! Very fine!" ejaculated John Harbuckle, slowly and solemnly. "Yet those docks, large as they are, are too small for us now; we must go much further down the river, our ships have grown so huge! But I must not keep you standing out in the sun without your hat."

"Oh, I'm a Salamander!" said Penrose, springing over one of the deep trenches that cross the roof. "Let me help you," he added, as he alighted on the other side, holding out his hand to the slow-

footed old bachelor, who did not disdain his aid.

A minute or two afterwards they had safely passed over the intersecting ridges, and were standing beside the north-west turret. Penrose unlocked the door; then led the way up a very narrow staircase to a very small room—if room it could be called—on the upper story, where, as the warder had told Mrs. Bayliss, the little round-arched Norman windows had been nearly all blocked up, leaving only one solitary ray of sunlight, which, as they entered, was striking on a wall of the roughest unhewn stone.

"A Rembrandt!" exclaimed John Harbuckle, as he stepped into the cell.

"Not I, surely?" asked Penrose, stepping into the centre of the ray of light, which, softly encompassing him, added mystery to his already sufficiently un-English face and figure.

It was, for the moment, as if he had

just come down from the sky on that sunbeam, through that little Norman window!

John Harbuckle, from a dark angle of the rough stone walls, looked at Basil Penrose with a glance of keen but slightly bewildered criticism.

"No, no!" he cried, "you're not at all a Rembrandt! Neither are you altogether of to-day. You are——" He hesitated; he had the collector's instinct for fitting a person or a thing in its proper chronological niche; he could never be comfortable about a book, a building, or a work of art, until he was certain of what period it was an example. There was something about Penrose that seemed to suggest a work of art. John Harbuckle looked at that strange face in the one strong sunbeam; he marked the splendid head, the ruthless, sensitive mouth, the obstinate chin, and he hesitated. "It eludes me for the moment," he said. "But I have seen your prototype before,

somewhere. Most distinctly, Rembrandt is *not* your school. It was the light, and the room—if we may speak of this turret as a room—that caused my mind to revert to his rendering of the alchemist of the Middle Ages."

"Only," said Penrose, "as you see, there are no uncouth monsters suspended from my roof. The astrolobe is represented by my little equatorial; my spectroscope occupies the place of honour; and instead of a book filled with cabalistic signs of Sol and Luna, here are"—taking up a couple of volumes from the narrow bench before the window—"here are the transactions of the Royal Society, and 'Optik,' by my master, Helmholtz. So, after all, and in spite of my mop of hair, which is, more than anything, the cause of people's thinking me a mystery, I belong to To-day, as you are pleased to call this part of the nineteenth century."

John Harbuckle surveyed Penrose with

a well-pleased but questioning scrutiny. Penrose's research, interesting as it might prove, was just then far less so than Penrose himself. As, however, he took up the volumes and declared himself of To-day, John Harbuckle succeeded in placing the young man in what seemed to the elderly archæologist, in spite of that assertion about To-day, his rightful chronological position. "A distinct survival!" he said to himself. "A Cinquecento young man! A very remarkable example of the Italian Renaissance." And, having settled this point to his satisfaction, John Harbuckle felt himself at liberty to turn his attention to other matters.

"I fear," he said aloud, "that my interest in your research is very far in advance of my practical acquaintance with the subject. I much regret that the exigencies of commercial life, to which the tastes of an antiquary have been added, have hardly permitted me to acquire even

a superficial knowledge of the wonderful advances which workers in the exact sciences have made in recent times. What, may I ask," he went on, with an eagerness unusual for him—"what is the immediate object of admitting only this isolated ray of sunlight?"

"Well, you see," said Penrose, with the sharp incisiveness and the plunging-at-once-into-the-subject expression so peculiarly the characteristic of the modern young man of science, that, for the time, Basil Penrose might himself have been almost mistaken for one—"well, you see, Graham Bell has, by the telephone, converted electricity into sound. Now, I want to try whether the vibrations we know as the phenomenon called *light*, can't also be rendered evident to our senses as *sound*. Here, for example, are these two narrow slices of crystal——"

But here I retire as quickly as possible; for, slightly to alter John Harbuckle's

remark, the exigencies of my life, to which my own tastes, such as they are, and an extra share of my sex's general incapacity for comprehending anything "exact" have been added, would make any attempt on my part to reveal the secrets of Basil Penrose's laboratory so simply ludicrous, that the most commonplace man would be able to demonstrate the outrage to common sense it involved, without calling Basil Penrose to help him.

The south-east turret, however, has no door, nor stair, nor laboratory—the south-east turret that is the dark, cheerless cell into which a certain poor old ape once crept to die alone. It is nice and cool on a blazing day like this. I shall imitate the poor old ape as far as the slinking away goes, and shall wait there until John Harbuckle and the young man of the name of Penrose come out.

When I am tired of sitting up in the dark corner, I can look out of the hole

which once was a window, and see the ships in the docks, and the river Thames, and the far off Shooter's Hill, amusing myself in a vague, inexact, feminine way; and wondering all the time whether I am glad or sorry that my dear Alison, whom I love so much, has met that Wizard of the north-west turret, the young man, Basil Penrose.

Well, they have met; for weel, for woe —*they have met!* Yet, I ask myself again, why did not Alec come to her during those empty, deary days, when love and liking seemed so nearly balanced that a feather's weight would have turned the scale? Is it for the best that what has been, has been? It is for the best that what is to be, will be? It is not yet given to us to answer; all we know is—*they have met!*

* * * * *

"As regards the crystals and other stones, I think I may be able to be of some

assistance to you," was John Harbuckle's first remark, as he and Penrose left the Tower together. "I am often in the way of picking up such things."

"Thanks!" returned Penrose. "Also very many thanks for taking so much interest in my work. I like people to like my work."

"The gratitude is all due from me, I venture to think. It is seldom I enjoy an hour as thoroughly as the one just past. I wish you every success, with all my heart. Good day to you, good day."

John Harbuckle may have enjoyed that hour with Penrose very thoroughly; he certainly did *not* enjoy the one that followed it.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDDAY LULL.

"WELL, and who are his people?" asked Mary Bayliss abruptly, the very first moment she found herself alone with her brother. In the presence of Alison not one syllable respecting John Harbuckle's visit to the Tower had been uttered.

Poor Alison! How she had longed to be able to ask her uncle half a thousand questions! Curiosity had always been very strong in her, but never in her life had it ever been so much excited as by Basil Penrose. She, however, cared but little who his people were; she was longing to know who he himself was, and what was his work. There was no

chance for her, either during dinner or immediately afterwards, so she slipped furtively up to Uncle John's den, hoping to get a quiet five minutes with him presently.

It was just after she had closed the door behind her that Mrs. Bayliss, satisfied her daughter was out of earshot, put that abrupt question.

"His people! I am sure I don't know, Mary; he never mentioned them," returned John, with some hesitation.

"I should be rather surprised if he had!" retorted Mary. "Depend upon it, he has something to conceal!"

"We never approached domestic topics," said John evasively.

"And you never put any questions to him on the subject?"

"Certainly not! Most decidedly not! As it happens, I was too deeply engrossed in his experiments to give his family—if he have one—so much as a thought. If it

had been otherwise, I should not have put a question, because I always imagine that people tell you, without the asking, as much about their private concerns as they wish you to know."

"Which, in his case, is—nil!" said the widow conclusively. "I suppose he did not ask after me, nor after Alison?"

"He never alluded to either of you," said John, as if wearied to death of the subject.

"He appears to have the manners of a perfect gentleman!" said Mary acidly.

"I agree with you; he has," said John, and would have walked off to his den, had not his sister detained him, and drawn from him a short and very prosaic account of his visit; after which he made his escape upstairs, it is true, but only to be followed by his sister, who was sure she should there find her daughter preparing to extort the minutest details from the much-enduring John.

Alison and her uncle were, consequently, not left together for one moment, either that evening or the next morning; and for how much longer she would have been kept waiting, I cannot tell, if she had not happened, later in the day, to run across John Harbuckle, close by the Royal Exchange, when she lost no time in taking him into the building, and walking him up and down there for nearly half an hour; after which they had to retire to Birch's, to refresh themselves, poor John Harbuckle feeling quite worn out, and Alison very festive. They did not mention this on their return home.

John Harbuckle's account of his visit, as related to his niece, differed widely from that given to his sister. It was far from being prosaic; on the contrary, having over-night worked up the subject very carefully in a long letter to his old friend, Thomas Woolcomb, he had now the whole of the details admirably arranged for

effective description. Sir Walter Scott, himself, had never appealed to Alison's imagination more forcibly than did that old bachelor uncle of hers, as he described to her the rough turret and the isolated ray.

Pleasant food for her fancy! All the more pleasant, that she knew it was forbidden. That north-west turret, meeting her at every turn from the windows of her home, became at once the centre of a romance, with which she herself was in some vague fashion connected; that north-west turret compelled her constantly to gaze, and gaze at it.

His work there—his research—"pure science"—those words John Harbuckle had used over and over again; those words, so much "in the air," but so hopelessly beyond her own range of knowledge, what an attraction they had for her! How they revealed Basil Penrose to her as one who could teach her very much! And to

Alison, by whom the humblest contribution to her little stock of knowledge was at all times thankfully received, the person who could teach her *much* was, indeed, of inestimable worth.

"Pure science;" what an appeal the term—to her so vague and beautiful—was to Alison's veneration! "Pure science!" "Exact science!" Oh, the charm in those words, and, consequently, in Basil Penrose.

As for Mrs. Bayliss, I believe that, to her mind, the scientific world was merely a collection of more or less heterodox people, entirely governed by the great firm (she always joined them together, as if they had been partners)—the great firm of "Huxley, Tyndall, & Co." She did not think the better of Basil Penrose because he was a scientific man; she had no respect for scientific men, unless they were officers in the Engineers, or had invented a new explosive, or a gun that was manufactured

in the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, and employed in British warfare.

There was, nevertheless, in Mrs. Bayliss's mind a very strong desire to know more about the family and antecedents of Basil Penrose. She never mentioned his name in her daughter's hearing, but Alison knew as certainly that her mother was frequently turning over and over her scanty stock of information on this subject, as Mrs. Bayliss knew that Alison continually had Basil Penrose in her thoughts, and that her thoughts of him were full of interest, and full of romance; if, indeed, they did not already go further.

She was perfectly right, as far as she went; but she left two important items out of her consideration — her daughter's reverent enthusiasm for work that was above her comprehension, and that ever-recurring, but never-answered question of hers: "Was he really pleased to see me again? Did he care to meet 'the lady of

the red, red roses' once more—and so near the Tower? Did he care? Was he pleased?"

So matters stood for some fortnight or more, and during that time the mother and daughter did not make that advance in companionableness that they should have made—that, probably, they would have made, had not Alec Carruthers and Basil Penrose been to both of them not only subjects on which neither dared to speak to the other, but subjects that prevented free intercourse altogether.

On Friday morning, about a fortnight after John Harbuckle's visit to the Tower, Alison went out for the double purpose of executing a little commission for her mother in Cheapside, and going to one of those midday services that are now usual in many of the City churches.

Friday, in some parts of the ecclesiastical world, is invested with a certain sacredness. It is a day on which the Litany is ap-

pointed to be read or sung; consequently, those who wish to see the interior of the City churches cannot do better than visit them on a Friday. He will be sure to find some of them open from one to two p.m.; during which time a slight midday lull touches even the rush of the busiest London streets.

Alison, to whom the open door of any place of worship presented an attraction not easily resisted, generally went to church on a Friday. On other days, she went to St. Paul's, or the Sunday School Union, or the Aldersgate Noon Prayer-Meeting, or dropped in—for her practice was catholic in the extreme—at all sorts of out-of-the-way lectures in all sorts of buildings.

Alison had a great and omnivorous appetite for such things, and a most fervent love for the Whole Church. She had, when she first came from Birrendale, made up her mind to see the interior of every

place of worship within the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction, whether beautiful or ugly, interesting, or, to other people, utterly dull.

On the eventful morning in question, a very slight thing altered her destination. She started from home in the direction of Aldgate, and had nearly reached the top of the Minories, when, uncertain of her mother's commission, she went home for definite orders, and then turned her steps towards Cheapside, to the destruction of the plan she had mapped out for herself.

She reached the Mansion House without the slightest adventure, but at the Mansion House she paused for an instant. It was a bright, sunny morning; that part of the City looked clean, and even gay. There was a striped awning by the side of the Mansion House; the purveyors and their carts were purveying the civic banquet that was to take place in the evening, and to which John Harbuckle was going.

The broad, new Queen Victoria Street stretched invitingly before her. It was out of her way a little, yet she took it instead of the more direct Poultry. Afterwards, many a time afterwards, she tried to find the reason that had prompted her to turn out of her way at that critical juncture.

"It must have been the tower of St. Mary Aldermary. I saw it, and was obliged to go to it!" This was her ultimate conclusion. That may have been the case, but if so, Alison showed no sign at the time. She walked on steadily along the shady side of Queen Victoria Street, so clad about with quietness that no one noticed her, neither did she notice any one; nor did she stop to look at anything, so occupied was she with her own thoughts, until she came to St. Mary Aldermary, nearly opposite Mansion House Station, when she pulled up with as sudden a halt as if the ground she trod on had come to

an abrupt end, and left her on the brink of a precipice.

The name so constantly in her mind, on her brain, had suddenly become visible to her outward eyes! There, straight before her, in the brightest, bluest capitals, was "Basil Penrose;" but with a significant addition: "The Rev. Basil Penrose, M.A."

Alison found herself reading a special notice on a large board, which was propped up against the hot wall of the church, within an enclosed space. The sunshine fell full on the great blue letters; she looked at them, and looked again; she read them over and over, but she felt as if she could hardly believe her eyes, as if—but there they were!

Now, ever since Alison had been able to read at all, she had made a point of reading all the notices on church boards or shop windows she came across. She and Jessie —who hated them—had had many a word

about them; but now Jessie was married and gone, Alison was quite free to read as many notices as she chose, and she chose to read every one she found attached to a church.

Had that notice merely referred to the Rev. John Smith, Brown, or Robinson, Alison would not have failed to have gone through it. Under any circumstances, and with any name, that notice would have been especially attractive to her. It emanated from one of the great religious societies, on behalf of which sermons were to be preached on the following Sunday at various churches; among others, at that church, and at St. Mary Abchurch, Cannon Street, the morning sermon at this last to be by "The Rev. Basil Penrose, M.A., Rector of Low Kelvingham, Suffolk."

"It isn't possible! It isn't possible that he—no, no, that's absurd! But he does fall into a sort of pulpit tone, doesn't he? He can't be a clergyman; I'm sure he can't

be; it isn't possible! His brother, perhaps? But his brother wouldn't have the same name; of course not! His father, of course; it must be his father! Why, then, didn't he speak of him? Yet, why should he? What business is it of ours who his father is? Only one likes to know. I wonder what mother will say! Perhaps she'll like him better when she hears of it. She always thinks people ought to be in some list. We shall be able to find him—no, not him—that name in the Clergy List now. His father—if it is his father—will be sure to be there. I wonder if that gate is unlocked? I'll just try. I'll go right to that board and touch it if I can; then I shall know I'm not dreaming! The Rev. Basil Penrose, M.A.!"

There was the name in the great blue capitals, against the sunny wall, hard and real, looking down on to the hot pavement of the street toward which the body of the church runs out. Above it, along the spine,

so to speak, of nave and aisle, through two lines of open quatrefoil stonework, were glimpses of sky and cloud. Hidden away from sight by a tall block of modern buildings was the lofty Gothic tower, springing right from the ground, as one may see by turning the corner into Bow Lane.

This corner it was that Alison turned very quickly. She twisted the handle of a large gate of ecclesiastical pattern; it opened easily, and Alison was instantly in a cool, shady passage, between the houses and the tall tower of St. Mary's, the top of which, with its four pinnacles, rose boldly into the June sunlight, its base being in the deepest shadow. Alison, eager only to get to the notice, passed swiftly through the paved enclosure, went up to the board, and put her fingers over the hot blue letters that made up the name.

It was real, tangible; it could be no illusion, it could be no phantom of her imagination. She touched it; then feeling

that, as it was so near the public pathway, she might be observed, she turned hastily, and retired into the shadow between the houses and the church tower.

There a cool breeze fanned her heated cheeks. The little passage was itself deliciously quiet, although the clatter of the great thoroughfare was so near. She walked backwards and forwards several times, looking intently at the board whenever she came in sight of it. It did not move; it was always in its place, and always there were the great blue letters of the name—always "The Rev. Basil Penrose, M.A., Rector of Low Kelvingham, Suffolk."

"But why should I think it so marvellous?" presently said Alison. "Why shouldn't he have a clerical relative, as well as any one else? Or is it possible he himself could be the Rector? Clergymen do strange things in these days; and that pulpit tone he falls into so naturally—can it be possible that he himself is the Rector?

Oh no; it's absurd. Is he too young? Well, not many rectors are so young; but some are—Mr. Harrington, of St. Elphec's, for instance. It might be a family living, and so it might be managed. But —why, it's quite ridiculous to suppose that the Basil Penrose I saw at the Queen's House the other day, turning the winch of that——" Perhaps it was the breeze made her shudder. "No, no; he could not be the preacher! And this is such an extremely orthodox society, this society in aid of which the sermons are to be preached. I don't know why, but I feel quite certain *he* isn't at all orthodox in anything. Of course, that society would only choose very, very sound men to preach for them; so it couldn't possibly be the Basil Penrose who has the laboratory up in that turret of the White Tower. I must go on, or some one will be noticing me."

She took a last look at the board against the hot stone wall, lingered a moment beside

the little rockery of the churchyard, so deep in shadow, so carefully laid out, where ivy and bright flowers were growing among the few graves. Then she went along Bow Lane into Cheapside, and managed to execute her mother's commission with commendable exactness, although the hard, bright blue of those great capitals was so impressed upon her retina that it clashed quite painfully with the "peacock" silk she had to match.

Paternoster Row was not many yards further on, and that row had, as a rule, many attractions for Alison. But to-day she never thought of it, nor of any of her surroundings. She returned at once through the midday roar of Cheapside, which also she never noticed, that name so filled her mind.

In Lombard Street, an experienced person might have observed a hardly perceptible lull, accompanied by a tendency to luncheon, as evidenced by the crowds besieging the

confectioner's, the trays that were being carried along the path, and, strange but pleasing contrast, the open door of St. Edmund's, that East Anglian martyr and king, in the centre of the street, through which open door several persons were passing. Cheapside and Lombard Street were hot and glaring, Alison was tired; besides, she could not go by the open door. So she went in, cautiously raised the thick curtain, and found herself one of a congregation of forty or fifty people. There was no seat near the door she could have taken without disturbing some one else, so she quietly knelt down behind the last bench.

The Litany was being intoned by a young clergyman, who was kneeling before a gorgeous altar; there were many young choir-men, and more choir-boys, looking cool in white surplices; there were flowers and bright banners, and a fine organ. It was very charming, but Alison was not just then in tune with it; so, knowing of another

oasis in the great banking-house desert, that promised deeper restfulness and cooler shadow, she stole away, and a minute or two later was kneeling in "St. Mildred's Mild Church," where the Litany was being leisurely read by an elderly clergyman, accompanied by a more elderly clerk.

Deep, indeed, was the quiet, intense the repose of this City church, disturbed by no murmur from the outside world, that was so near it, and yet so remote. Here Alison saw that pathetic figure, so touching, so familiar to her, so constantly met in City churches—the aging man, in aging clothes, kneeling with deeply bowed head, in profound supplication, always solitary, always praying, always, one fancies, heart-stricken with vain strivings against a world too hard for him.

Such a figure did Alison see as she softly entered "St. Mildred's Mild Church." She was very tender-hearted, and there was something that reminded her a little of

Uncle John—of Uncle John, as she felt he would have looked had he failed in business. She was so sorry for him; he, for the moment, banished the glaring blue letters from her brain, and helped her to join in that remembrance of the woes of humanity which was at that hour going up from so many hearts and voices all over the City.

A beautiful girl, beautifully dressed, represented, with herself, all that was feminine; a lad sitting behind her, masculine youth; three or four middle-aged men dropped in and hid themselves away in cool, dark places near the gloomy but well cared for lobby. "St. Mildred's" was a shadow indeed—cool, almost cold, from the burden and heat of the City noontide! What a pity "St. Mildred's," and every other place of rest and worship, cannot stand open every day, and all day long!

An ancient organist shuffled in during the Litany; when it was ended he played a hymn of angelic beauty, and the lovely

girl who sat opposite Alison sang it, and to Alison that hymn always was linked in her memory with Basil Penrose.

Then a glorious burst of the full-toned organ swept through the empty church, and Alison turned again to home and Tower Hill; but all the way home the bright blue letters went before her, and over and over again she read the name: "The Rev. Basil Penrose! The Rev. Basil Penrose!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"BUT LEONARD TARRIES LONG!"

I DO not suppose that Alison had ever in her life kept a secret for any length of time. She could have done so, I am sure, had she felt it to be her duty so to do, for under any circumstances she would have tried to do her duty. But secrecy was abhorrent to her nature; she loved to take every one into her confidence; consequently, she was most anxious to tell the news at home.

She felt, as she approached Tower Hill, that she would have given all her little stock of worldly goods for the privilege of talking freely to her mother about that notice. The news was positively burning

her tongue, and how *not* to tell would be, she knew, a most difficult task.

"Has Uncle John been in to lunch, and gone out again, mother?" she asked, as she entered the dining-room, which, shaded by projecting sun-blinds, afforded a grateful contrast to the hot streets.

"Why, yes, my dear; he could not wait for you; he is very busy to-day—and aren't you rather later than usual?"

"No, I think not, mother. I have been to St. Mildred's Mild Church, and have come straight home. May I leave my hat here? I'm quite tired. It's a fagging day out-of-doors, in spite of the breeze. It's deliciously cool here!"

Mrs. Bayliss, during this little speech of Alison's, was looking after her daughter's comfort in so amiable a way, that Alison, as she attacked a salad, could not resist the exclamation—

"Mother, I've made a discovery!"

"A discovery! And what may it be

this time? Roman, Saxon, Danish, or Norman? The original trowel used in laying the foundation-stone of the White Tower?"

"It's about—about"—and Alison hesitated, already half sorry she had began the revelation—"that is—you know St. Mary Aldermary?"

"My dear child, I really can't be expected to remember the names of all the City churches!" threw in Mrs. Bayliss. "It's Legion—taking them all together."

"Well, but you know Mansion House Station, and Bow Lane. It's the church nearly opposite the station; you remember how Uncle John weeps over"—she paused—("the atrocity—the criminality"—she checked herself from quoting the terms so often used by the ever-wanting-to-demonstrate Basil Penrose, and went on)—"over the wicked people who ran that block of buildings up in front of the church tower, because that tower springs right from the

ground, and there are so few in the City that spring right from the ground! It was such a shame! Don't you remember, Uncle John said he wished he were a millionaire, that he might buy up that block of buildings, and let the public have the benefit of——"

"Oh, I know which one you mean! Well, what has happened there? Have they suddenly burst out into lawlessness? Are they going to get put into prison, like St. Vedast?"

"Oh no, mother! It was a board—a notice-board I saw outside——"

"I breathe freely once more! From your manner, I thought something shocking had happened."

"But you *are* going to be rather astonished!" exclaimed Alison, by this time convinced more than ever that she was, indeed, making a fool of herself.

"Well, dear, it takes a great deal nowadays to astonish me."

"But supposing you knew that—perhaps it's in the *City Press?*"

And, no longer able to maintain the smallest semblance of indifference, Alison sprang up and went to the paper-rack; where, after a few minutes' rummaging, she found the journal she was hunting for.

"Look, mother!" she said nervously, pointing to the announcement of the same notice she had seen in the great blue capitals.

"The *Reverend* Basil Penrose!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, with the emphasis of sudden amazement.

"Yes; who can it possibly be? It isn't a common name. It must be—I should think it must be—a relative, mustn't it?"

And Alison's tone gradually sank back into one of extreme shyness as her sentence went on, and she felt painfully that her mother was noticing her heightened colour, and the excitement she knew only too well was dancing wildly in her eyes.

"Humph! Well, I shall be glad to find, I am sure, that that very objectionable young man has at least *one* decent relative in the world. The question then arises," she went on with significant dignity—"the question then naturally arises, if the rector of that place in Suffolk is his father, or uncle, or near relative, why did he not mention him? Why has he carefully avoided giving us any clue to his family connections?"

"Can it be—no, it can't be, can it? Can it possibly be himself?" asked Alison, taking refuge in a glass of water the moment she had uttered the words.

"I should hope not! For the sake of the Church, and the parish, I should most earnestly hope not!" exclaimed the widow with unction. Her voice and manner adding very distinctly, "Alison, Mr. Penrose is a person I cannot discuss with you; be good enough not to allude to that individual again in my presence."

Alison acted on the unspoken warning, promptly retiring from the dangerous ground she had rashly ventured upon; but she took the memory of Basil Penrose with her, and also the notice of the sermon next Sunday morning, fully making up her mind that, come what might, to St. Mary Abchurch she would go, and the Reverend Basil Penrose she would both see and hear.

For the present, however, she dropped the subject, and immediately displayed the peacock silk, which, fortunately, gave great satisfaction, both to Alison and her mother, as the perfection with which she had matched the pattern proved that she was not absolutely off her head, in spite of that wonderful discovery, and of the hardness of the bright blue capitals that had almost blinded her, and which still gleamed before the eyes of her mind.

* * * * *

John Harbuckle dined that day at the

Mansion House. Mrs. Bayliss hated the house of an evening when he was out of it. This brother and sister had but little in common, but the knowledge that he was in the house, even if it were in his remote den, in some measure alleviated that pressure of intense loneliness which had never been altogether absent from the widow's heart since her James had been taken from her. Her James had been the one sole partner of her life; his place was vacant for ever. Still, her brother was a man; he went down to his day's work, and came upstairs to protect her in the evening; he was, at least, a man about the place of an evening. The house was unbearable without its master.

"Mother, shall we go and sit in the Tower Gardens? When I went out, I noticed them scoring the Moat for tennis; I dare say they'll be playing this evening," said Alison, as she and her mother stood by the window, watching John Harbuckle

walking away from them, leaving them all alone.

"We must go somewhere, I suppose," sighed Mrs. Bayliss; "we can't stay here."

So they went out together, and sat watching the game, in a summer-house, opposite that Devereux Tower from which Queen Elizabeth's Essex had gone to lay his head on the block. It was gloomy within that summer-house, so they presently walked up and down the long walks, between the coping of the Tower Moat and the narrow banks of garden, overshadowed by thick trees, still watching the game that was being played far down below. The minds of both were preoccupied; their interest in the game was not vivid; but when it was over, and the officers who had played were all gone, when the great Moat was quite deserted, when a sombre twilight fell on walls and bastions, then the widow could bear the Tower Gardens no longer.

"Come, darling," she sighed, taking her daughter's arm, and leaning heavily upon it. "Come, this place is too dreadful!"

A little poem of Scott's, that her husband had often read to her, as they used to sit on a ledge of rock, by the salmon-pool, near their old Birrendale home, in the sweet days before the evil times came, had been running in her mind, always in his voice, ever since she and Alison had been out in those gardens:—

> "The sun upon the lake is low;
> The wild birds hush their song:
> The hills have evening's deepest glow,
> But Leonard tarries long!"

"Tarries long. Ah, how long! I shall go to him; but he will not return to me."

All the desolation of eventide, without the return of the beloved, was in the widow's sigh as she took her daughter's arm and leaned heavily upon it.

A responsive sob rose from Alison's heart; inaudible it was, but it seemed

almost to choke her. In the gathering twilight, the sad, sad past came back. She could hear the rush of the Birren in the ebbing tide of traffic that reached them in the Tower Gardens. She raised her mother's hand, and pressed it still more firmly on her own strong young arm, and side by side they paced the path above the Moat, slowly, very slowly. Sure of her daughter's sympathy, the widow murmured the last verse of the little poem :—

"Now to their mates the wild swans row,
By day they swam apart;
And to the thicket wanders slow
The hind beside the hart.
The wood lark at his partner's side
Twitters his closing song;
All meet whom day and care divide,—
But Leonard tarries long!"

Oh, Birrendale! Oh, days that *were*, and loss that ever *is!*

Alison's inmost heart trembles in response to her mother's low tones. Northern music, northern poems!—There

is a sensitive chord in her that always vibrates to their magic touch, that always answers, in spite of her love for London, "Take me back to my North Countrie!"

Why did not Alec come then? If she had seen his quiet form coming towards them, how right, how familiar it would have seemed to her at that moment! If he had come and offered his arm to her mother with that courteous deference of his, how welcome would he have been at that moment, to both! But, like the "Leonard" of the poem, Alec tarried long. He tarried long, and a sadness, a terrible loneliness, oppressed Alison as well as her mother.

That evening, the Gardens, the Tower, the Hill, the whole neighbourhood, was haunted by the saddest memories of those whom they had known and loved and lost; and behind all sense of personal bereavement, personal suffering, lay always, on all round, as for ever, long as the Tower

of London stands, there must always lie—unseen, but ever present, ever felt—*the Shadow of the Axe*.

They were unable to cope with the sense of desolation that came over them. Except on the saddest of all subjects they could not have spoken freely, for Alec Carruthers and Basil Penrose stood between them, and that one sad subject brought with it thoughts "too deep for words," so they were all but silent.

They were lonely out-of-doors, but the great house struck them, when they caught sight of it across the Gardens of Trinity Square, as so appalling in its emptiness, that both of them shrank back instinctively from the thought of entering it. There was not even Uncle John there to-night.

The evening itself was grey, except in the solemn, luminous west. The thick foliage of the trees drooped heavily, as if tired out by the heat of the parting day. Tower Hill was deserted. The plateau

in front of the gigantic bonded warehouses was quiet; the vans, the carmen, all were gone.

"Alison, I cannot go in!" said Mrs. Bayliss in a tone of despair, a singular dread of facing the house compelling her to stop her slow steps. The hall door was standing open; the hall, then in the deepest shadow, looking dark and forbidding as a vault.

Alison's eyes were younger and sharper than her mother's. "There is some one at our door," she observed.

Her mother turned in that direction; she did not see the flush that suddenly dyed Alison's face. Mrs. Bayliss set her *pince-nez* in position.

"It is that wretched young Penrose!" she exclaimed, as if much annoyed. "Let us turn quickly into Catherine Court, before he sees us!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"GONE!"

But Mrs. Bayliss, when she imagined she could quietly slip with Alison into Catherine Court, had not taken into consideration those two very quick eyes that all who knew Basil Penrose well averred he had at the back of his head, hidden away somewhere among the clustering masses of his dark hair.

Before Mrs. Bayliss could turn under the old ironwork of the entrance of the Court, Basil Penrose had left the open door of John Harbuckle's house, and was coming swiftly towards the widow and her daughter.

"I hear Mr. Harbuckle is out," he began,

as soon as he was within speaking distance. "Perhaps you would not mind telling him that if he has done anything about those crystals he promised to look up for me, I shall be glad to hear from him."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Bayliss, with a stiff bend of her head.

Alison put out her hand with a pleasure that all her fear and trembling could not disguise. Basil Penrose was looking more like an ordinary mortal than usual that evening. He wore a collar and tie, his pockets were not bulgy, they did not exhibit the ends of a foot-rule. His mere presence, and the sound of his voice, banished loneliness at once. Day and society came back with him. And Mrs. Bayliss had still a vague dread of that house. The hall, seen through the open door, looked so wide, so deserted, its heavy panelling so gloomy. She had a curiosity, too, about that "Reverend;" and, in point of fact, Basil Penrose had quietly made up his

mind that he was going in with them. And so, when he suggested, "Perhaps I had better write a note to Mr. Harbuckle," she replied, "Will you come in? You may be able to make us understand what you mean, without putting it on paper;" although the invitation was cold and distant enough.

"Thanks," he returned, and walked with Mrs. Bayliss towards the house, to Alison's very great delight.

"How gay the world is to-night!" observed Basil Penrose, twisting his face up to the grave sky in a way that showed his aquiline profile to the best advantage.

"We were just thinking how dull it was," sighed Mrs. Bayliss.

"Do you call this place the world?" asked Penrose.

"Well, perhaps not," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"I fancied you did not; that is why it is dull to you. Now, I do, Providence be praised! However, it is what you would

call the great world, the world I hate, that is so gay to-night. Mr. Harbuckle, I hear, is festiving with the King of the City, and the Guards are going to a ball the Knightsbridge Barracks. In a couple of hours the Tower will be as deserted as Woolwich Common, or the Stock Exchange on a Derby day."

"Do you know Woolwich?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, unbending a trifle, and hoping to extract a little personal information, besides taking a natural interest in the locality.

"I know a good many places," said Penrose, who was quite aware of Mrs. Bayliss's intention.

"Why didn't you go to the ball?" asked Alison.

"I couldn't run to it," returned Penrose.

"But some one might have driven you," suggested Alison wickedly, her spirits mounting suddenly, but not very steadily.

"I should like to see that some one!" exclaimed Penrose. "But you hardly catch

my meaning. To put it plainly, my dress clothes are seedy, and I can't afford new ones; I wouldn't if I could."

"Then, you don't dance?" asked Mrs. Bayliss.

"Not in the garb of an undertaker. Doublet and trunk hose, or, better still, tights, are my wear. I wasn't asked; that's another reason."

They entered the house, went up the staircase, the gloomy light striking here and there the edges of dark oak, but without making either Alison or her mother uncomfortable, now there was Basil Penrose to take care of them and talk to them; and so, past Uncle John's oriental jars and broad-leaved plants on the landing, into the drawing-room.

In the panel of looking-glass, where once Alison had suddenly come upon Herself, for one moment she again saw a deep and solemn reflection of her own image, and of Basil Penrose, close behind her, as they

passed together to the window-settle. It gave her a very curious thrill. She did not stay to think whether it was pleasant or otherwise; she was far too delighted to have him there to think of anything else.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Penrose!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss suddenly, as if the question had only just occurred to her, "have you a relative of the same name as yourself, who is Rector of Low Kelvingham, Suffolk? because I see a clergyman of that name is advertised to preach next Sunday, at St. Mary Abchurch. Look, here it is, in the *City Press*."

She passed him the paper; he did not take it.

"My father, most unhappily!" he said, waving off the paper with a slight movement of his hand.

"You and he are not, then, on good terms?" asked the widow.

Penrose inserted his slender hand into his breast pocket, and drawing out a

number of letters, he quickly turned them over, until he came to a certain envelope.

"Here are some family portraits," he said gravely, putting the envelope into Mrs. Bayliss's hand. "This little group may perhaps give you a faint idea of our relative positions, of the present and pleasant state of our family feeling."

It was a slight pen-and-ink sketch, hastily scratched in one corner. There, in the centre of the group, sat Basil Penrose himself, disguised, not as a British workman, but as a charmingly grotesque fiend, very mediæval; while round him, half a dozen ravens, in clerical surplices and academic hoods, were executing a war-dance with great excitement.

Alison looked over her mother's shoulder; she remembered how the Tower ravens had danced about poor Alec Carruthers. Basil Penrose had caught their menacing action, their would-if-I-could expression, exactly. The little

drawing, rough as it was, was suggestive and humorous beyond words. The monkey-like fiend, so calmly nursing its forked tail, the ill-tempered gravity of the lower part of the face, the tightly set lips, the exaggeration of nose and chin, until, without quite losing their resemblance to the original, they distinctly suggested "nut-crackers," the sphinx-like stolidity of one fast-closed eye, the twinkling wink of amusement in the other—all were full of life and insolence.

Mrs. Bayliss looked at it steadily and without a smile. Next to the Army and Navy, Captain Bayliss's widow placed the Church. She resented the sketch as an attack upon professional life in all its branches.

Alison, I am sorry to say, looked first at the group, and then at the model of the centre figure on the window-settle, and every muscle of her face quivered with suppressed merriment; which perceiving,

Basil Penrose hastily curled himself up into something very like the position of the grotesque fiend, and closing one eye as in the picture, dipped his head the least in the world towards Mrs. Bayliss, who was still scanning the envelope with evident disapproval. In plain English, he winked. Alison shook for an instant; then burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"Alison!" said her mother reprovingly; and she handed back the drawing to Basil Penrose, who was then gazing sullenly up at his own turret of the Tower.

"Then you belong, after all, to a clerical family," remarked the widow severely.

"That is my misfortune," said Penrose, a singularly morose expression gathering round his thin lips, which he compressed tightly as soon as he had uttered the words.

It puzzled Alison; but everything about him puzzled her. That was the charm of him.

"I assure you I would have avoided it,

had it been possible," he went on after a pause. "I was not consulted in the matter. It is a pity. It prevents my going to see them as often as I should do if they were commonly respectable persons. You may, perhaps, think it strange that I have never mentioned them. I have not done so because I am not proud of my people."

"No? Why not?"

"Why not? They are 'paid depravers of the people's morals,' as John Stuart Mill so neatly puts it, you know," replied Basil Penrose.

The corners of Mrs. Bayliss's mouth went down grimly, while Alison's eyebrows assumed a highly interrogative angle.

"That's not true!" she said, quickly and defiantly.

"There we differ," retorted Basil Penrose.

"I call that a lie of the first magnitude!" exclaimed Alison indignantly.

"Do you? So glad you don't call it *an untruth!*"

"And your women relatives? You have not introduced them into your 'family group.' That was, I think, if you will excuse my saying so, good taste on your part," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"Thank you. As far as my mother is concerned, I have too much respect for her——" Penrose began.

"I am glad there is at least one person you respect," Mrs. Bayliss threw in.

"She is such a perfect hypocrite! With her, hypocrisy is so thoroughly carried through, it becomes exalted to——"

"Oh, but you can't respect hypocrisy!" cried Alison vehemently.

"No, I don't: it's the perfection of it, not the thing itself, don't you see? It's the carrying it out so far that is so wonderful to me!" said Penrose.

Mrs. Bayliss sat stiffly upright.

Penrose, embracing one knee with both

his hands, gently swayed himself to and fro, his gaze fixed on space, as if contemplating the phenomenon of which he had just spoken—his mother's consummate hypocrisy. Alison discreetly looked out of the window. This subtle distinction was more than her simple nature could understand; but it was, nevertheless, deeply interesting to her. There was a long pause.

"You ignore, then, the old-fashioned commandment about honouring your father and mother? For myself, I think parents have a right to demand a certain amount of filial respect," said Mrs. Bayliss.

"They may demand what they like," exclaimed Penrose, with a ferocity that lit up his eyes and sharpened his features, "but in my case they won't get honour from me, unless they are honourable! Parents may, perhaps, be tolerated until their children are twenty-one; after that——" he shrugged his shoulders. "Excepting

always, and as a matter of course, the mother of the lady with the red, red roses!" And suddenly changing his tone with the last sentence, he bent his dusky head with a singularly graceful and courteous movement to the widow, whose asperity, however, he did not succeed in mollifying.

Did he, then, remember her and her roses? Alison wondered. This was the second time he had referred to them. But she had so poor an opinion of herself she could hardly think that his words meant anything more than a passing compliment —a pleasant way of putting things. Could it be possible, though, that she and the roses had made some sort of impression upon him?

Ah, my poor child, I am afraid you have already begun to look out greedily for the least sign, the frailest straw that may show, or only seem to show, the slightest turning of the current of his thoughts to you! Be careful! be careful!

Remember how you first were impressed by him. What was it that the hand now idly clasping its fellow was doing when first you saw it? And as he sits there, with that strange, imperious face of his darkly softened by the deep twilight, and by the overshadowing hair, the thin lips tightening again after the flattering smile and proud bend of the picturesque head, look well at him, and read that face; read as you never read before, and remember what you read.

But the flexible lips unclosed again. "Do not, however, jump at the conclusion that I have not thoroughly suppressed my parents," he went on; and neither Alison nor her mother could afterwards be positive whether he spoke in jest or sober earnest; "because that would be erroneous, and I should be sorry to mislead the ladies. I have suppressed my parents as far as concerns myself: I go my own way, they go theirs. When I found out—

which I did at a comparatively early age—that I, as well as the rest of my family, was subsisting on rapine, I simply said, I am going—and I went. I have never shared the spoil since. I'd tramp from door to door, as a journeyman glass and china mender—I've rather a pretty turn for that sort of thing—sooner than touch a penny of it; and, indeed, if my experiments don't succeed soon, it's on the cards that I shall have to do something of the sort, in order to get an occasional crust."

Pity and admiration sent a thrill through Alison. She was so sorry for any one who was poor. She had at one time had to take a very bitter dose of poverty herself; she knew what scanty dinners meant. And this young man, Penrose, surely he was a noble being! He was facing poverty for the sake of principle; a mistaken principle, truly— or so she, in her ignorance, thought it; but he might, after all, be right.

At any rate, he was steadfastly refusing to share in what he considered "spoil." It was a noble sacrifice! He was a grand being; he dared to be poor! How brave a man must be who dares to be poor! Then it was, at that very moment, as Basil Penrose was speaking about the "occasional crust," that Alison, as by a flash of inspiration, thought she saw a way of some day—some day, alas! too far in the future—being able to help him. To help him, help him with money! It seemed possible, only barely possible. Being just possible, it should be done.

It struck Mrs. Bayliss that Penrose would probably try to borrow money of her brother, John Harbuckle, who was only too ready, at all times, to help any martyr, any sufferer for conscience sake; the whole of which tribe she herself detested as heartily as she despised. "It is as I thought. He means to borrow money of John," passed through her mind as swiftly as the dazzling

hope of being able, one day, to help him, flashed into her daughter's brain.

Basil Penrose's next remark, separated by only a second from "the occasional crust," took both of them absolutely by surprise.

"But you are thinking of Raymond Lully, aren't you?" he asked, turning to Alison with an easy, smiling, whimsical familiarity, that was still perfectly courteous and respectful.

She shrank back from him suddenly, half in terror. What was he? A wizard, a necromancer, a practiser of the Black Art? How else could he so read her inmost thought? It was true. The name, Raymond Lully, had been in her mind, but far, far down.

"But you were, weren't you? You were thinking of Raymond Lully?" he repeated, and his tone was like a subtle caress. "See," it said, "I know all about you; I know the deepest recesses of your heart:

I know even your kind thoughts for me. Do not fear me!"

"How could you know?" asked Alison with a glowing blush and a faltering voice.

"That is my affair. I too was thinking of him."

Here was another mystery for Alison's mother. The name was unfamiliar to her; if she had heard it before, she had forgotten it.

"And pray, who is Raymond Lully?" she asked, in a far from amiable voice.

The question broke the spell. Alison began to laugh.

"Oh, you needn't be frightened of him, mother. He lived, like so many of my friends, in Edward the Third's time, and so has been dust for several centuries. He pretended he could make gold. They say he made the metal for Edward the Third's gold nobles. I was only thinking, you know, supposing we could make gold too, how very handy it would be sometimes; for the

want of money is so often the root of all evil."

"Not in my case," said Penrose. "But I like the old alchemists, especially those who worked in the Tower, a great deal better than all your kings and queens; except, perhaps, Henry the Eighth, for whom I always stand up, because he has been so much maligned; and there's sure to be good stuff in a man who's much maligned. No doubt he was perfectly right, from his own point of view, in having his wives' heads cut off. I like a man who has a point of view of his own, and sticks to it, in spite of the howlings of his own and other people's sentiments. Yes, Raymond Lully is rather an interesting man to read about! He had a little secret room, somewhere on the St. Katherine Dock side of the Tower; and although his belief that he could make gold by 'alkemony' shows that, to quote Da Vinci—the man after my own heart—'his judgments erred by

promising themselves effects such as are not caused by the experiments,' and his mania for converting or killing the Mohammedans shows him to have been rather an idiot; still, when the king wouldn't send out the army Lully had bargained for, Lully left off trying for the gold, which shows he was neither going to stand humbug from royalty, nor to try that little game himself. The Moneyers, again, I like; you know them, I suppose, Miss Bayliss?"

"No; do tell me!" said Alison warmly, thinking "How well he knows my likings!"

"The mere lists of their names is quite refreshing. Henry de Cornhill, Odo Parvus, Hugh Oisel, Ilger the goldsmith, and hosts of others. I feel a certain pleasure in working in the same place as these men worked in."

"It must be delightful!" exclaimed Alison. "But how can you remember their names so well?" she asked with intense admiration.

"Oh, I can always remember!"—a pause; then, with a slightly different inflection—"With me the difficulty is to forget."

Her glance that while he had been discussing Raymond Lully, had been raised to him with enthusiastic interest, fell.

He went on, as if to remove her slight embarrassment: "But I'll leave the old Moneyers of the Tower, after I've reminded you that there once was a King's Assay-master, named Peter Delveday, I've a certain respect for, because he wasn't above owning a homely English name—a very jolly name, too. If there had been a Shakespeare in Henry the Third's time, no doubt 'Mr. Williams' would have immortalized that name. Plucky of him, wasn't it—for a King's Assay-master not to be ashamed to sign himself Peter Delveday, when every one else was tagging on a Latin 'us,' or a Norman 'De.' Respectable old Minter that!"

"You've added another name to my Tower Memories! Thank you, thank you very much for Peter Delveday," said Alison brightly. "How well he knows what I value!" she thought again. And then she turned away, afraid that he might even read that thought; and her pleasure was patent enough to any one.

It annoyed Mrs. Bayliss very much, that common interest between those two. It struck her, also, that Basil Penrose had started this subject not only to please Alison, but to avoid further conversation about his family; and Mrs. Bayliss did not mean to be talked away from that point. She cared no more for Peter Delveday than for his successor, Bartholomeo de Castello; she wanted to know about Low Kelvingham Rectory.

"Have you any brothers or sisters?" she asked abruptly, resuming the interrogatory. Although she was sure Basil Penrose would not tell her one syllable

more than it pleased him she should know, she was determined to get as much out of him as he could be made to reveal.

"Brothers? fortunately, none! I had a sister," said Penrose, adding, as if to himself, "Poor little chap! poor little chap!"

"Ah!" thought Mrs. Bayliss, the tone further exciting her already awakened suspicions, as, no doubt, it was intended to do.

But Alison was deeply touched; she could not restrain the rush of sympathy that overflowed her tender heart. She fancied the bright eyes clouded with sorrow, although she hardly dared to look to see if they were, before she spoke. It is so sweet of a man to love his sister, to grieve for her griefs.

"She is dead, then?" Alison asked, under her voice.

"No; she isn't exactly dead," returned Penrose quite dryly, and without the

slightest corresponding sympathy in his tone. "She is a maniac—or I think her one, which, to me, amounts to the same sort of thing. But now, I am afraid you are going to think too well of me. You will be shocked to hear that I do not hate my people as much as I should do; and so, after all, I am but a poor imperfect worm, with nothing to boast of! I don't thoroughly hate even the poor old 'Rev.,' so hard it is to carry out the very simplest idea to its utmost limits!"

"You will go to church and hear him, then?" asked Alison, gently eager to lead Penrose back to good orthodox ways if possible, and instinctively taking upon herself the office of guardian angel, although, in the depth of her heart, she would not have him changed a fraction.

"Do you think I could countenance such folly, to call it by no harsher name?" Penrose asked.

"But he might be glad to see you

there," suggested Alison, very softly. "If I had a father, I should like to—to—" and she hesitated; but she never finished the halting sentence. She had approached a very tender subject. "When they are gone, you know——"

Penrose shrugged his shoulders slightly. Alison felt again that he considered her ignorance too dense and hopeless for him to attempt to penetrate.

"The poor old Rev.!" he went on. "I'm sorry for him. He was, before his trade utterly depraved him, worthy, by all accounts, of a better fate! I can't speak definitely, as he has always been a parson since I have had the misfortune of knowing him. That's the saddest part of the business. Now, he must have originally had some good stuff in him, because he married my mother; which he couldn't have done, you know, if he hadn't been most awfully plucky *au fond*. Now, I've always respected that plucky

action of his, although I don't respect him, because it's what scarcely any other clerical Englishman would have done. And you must know that his father, uncles, and cousins, are all tarred with the same brush; they are all professional depravers, etc., etc. I say, taking everything into consideration, it was an action that scarcely any other English crow would have been capable of, when *he married my mother.*"

He gave the last phrase with a curiously defiant emphasis. In less than an instant, a pretty scandal was pictured in Mrs. Bayliss's mind by those words. She began to think of a pretext for sending Alison out of the room. There was no knowing what that shocking young man might say. She made, however, no audible comment.

"Great heavens, it was splendid!" ejaculated Penrose. "The pluck of a life-time was concentrated into that act—the only brave thing he ever did! *He married my mother!*"

Dead, profound silence.

"Really, Mr. Penrose, you speak of your parents in a manner that—that I am not at all used to! Alison, my dear, will you take my cloak upstairs? And I want you to bring me down the work I began last week for the Kirk-hope bazaar. I don't quite remember where I put it—in the corner drawer, next the wardrobe," said Mrs. Bayliss significantly. "It's either there, or in the——"

"I think I know where it is, mother," said Alison, interrupting her, and rising hurriedly. She was desperately anxious to get her task over; it was horrible to have to go just then, when she was so deeply excited with these revelations.

"Perhaps you are not aware, Mr. Penrose," Mrs. Bayliss observed severely, as soon as the door had closed upon Alison—"you can, I think, hardly be aware that the way in which you speak of your parent's marriage is—is—that is, suggests

—I mean, you ought to be careful. Most sons would shrink——"

"My dear lady!" exclaimed Penrose, "I simply stated, as you were good enough to take an interest in my domestic concerns, the one cheering fact in our dreary family records."

"But, Mr. Penrose! Surely, surely, you cannot know what your words might suggest to some people? I trust you spoke in ignorance of what the observation you have had the bad taste to repeat before my daughter might be taken to imply."

"It is impossible for me to fathom the depths of vileness among which the conventional imagination works," said Penrose, with morose dignity. "Now I come to think of it, it is probable I may have been injudicious in my remarks; so, as I have awakened your suspicions, I will tell you the story of my parents' romantic marriage as soon as Miss Bayliss

returns. She, if no one else, will, I am sure, find it interesting."

"I cannot allow Alison to hear it—at least——" and feeling she had gone too far, Mrs. Bayliss attempted a lame apology. This was really more than she intended to have said.

"Then, I think I'll ask you to be kind enough to say good evening to Miss Bayliss for me," said Basil Penrose, rising and bowing with imperturbable gravity, as he added: "Madame, j'ai l'honeur de vous saluer!" in a pure Parisian accent, such as Mrs. Bayliss had very rarely heard in that house before, and which was to her mind another sign of his villainy.

Hardly had the street door closed than Alison, terrified by the sound, came rushing into the room with fevered cheeks and wild, bright eyes. The twilight—the poetry of evening—was all shut out, the gas was alight, her mother at the table, reading a letter.

"Gone!" she cried in bitter dismay, while the big tears of sudden pain gathered in her eyes. She felt as if her heart would break with the unbearableness of the disappointment. "Gone!"

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE SEDGES.

"ALAS, poor hurt fowl! Now will he creep into sedges." But one who has no home in London has a difficulty in finding the sedges into which he longs to creep.

Alec Carruthers, after his abrupt parting with Alison Bayliss, at the door of John Harbuckle's house, on the memorable day when he had walked back with her from the Tower, turned away in a blind fury of love and rage.

Neither knowing nor caring where he went, he walked on and on through the City streets, where gangs of navvies were hard at work, completing the Inner Circle of the underground railway, and then

along the broad Embankment, striding over the ground as if over a country road, never pausing, never turning, until the booming of Big Ben overhead roused him to the consciousness that he had already put a measurable distance between himself and Alison.

He stopped and stared for a minute at the river, then turned and retraced the way to Tower Hill. It was something to feel he was not going away from her then—that every step brought him, at any rate, physically nearer. Perhaps he might see her, or, at least, her shadow.

He paced up and down Tower Hill and Trinity Square. The moon rose; he still hoped she might come to the window, might see him; but she never came near it until past midnight, until long after all the lights in the house had been put out—until Alec had turned away again in despair, full of an intolerable pain, a torturing ache, and a smart of wounded

love and pride, the like of which he had never before imagined, but which he now believed would never cease.

For him, he felt, all was over. He had —with what fond shyness, and trembling hope, none but himself could ever know— put out to sea, with his whole freight of affection; he had been wrecked at once— totally, and with ignominy. This, at least, is as it appeared to him.

Yes, with ignominy! That was the very word he used, that had fixed itself in his brain, and refused to be dislodged. Poor Alison! She had tried so hard to save his feelings, and he would not let them be saved!

Rage died away very soon, but the sense of humiliating loss remained. Alec's first excursion into the mysterious realms of personal romance—absolutely his first— had come to an untimely end.

Was he a trespasser, a poacher, that he had been so ignominiously warned off

those fair domains, wherein other more happy fellow-mortals were free to wander at will? He, Alec Carruthers, to be treated as an intruder, a trespasser, a poacher! He, of all men in the world! It was more than he could understand; it left him dazed, stunned.

Yet, somewhere in the small hours, he wandered back to the Midland Hotel, St. Pancras; somewhere before the sun rose again he lapsed into unconsciousness. Hateful was the morning's light when he awoke to find the new day, the horrible new day, that made his loss look so sternly blank and real, had come, as come it would—

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow!"

But Alec Carruthers was not one to make any visible display of his feelings. Beyond a certain wan look about the setting of the eyes and the hollow of the temples, the young Scotsman who travelled

north that day, was, to all appearance, the same as the young Scotsman Alison had seen watching the door of the Queen's House, with the Tower ravens dancing before him. But to himself he was another being; a being he knew only too bitterly was himself, yet a being, as yet, most unfamiliar. There he was, alive—most keenly alive—with an intense acuteness and sensitiveness, that made life a torture; and there, a living creature, he sat with all his hopes, all his love dead around him.

He hardly stirred during that long journey. He spoke to no one. The dreary day went by, and when twilight came again he was in Scotland, and the train was slowing into the shabby little station that was the nearest to his home. Alec shook himself up. With a desperate effort at self-defence, he tried to drive all his wounded feelings so far back that no one might, he hoped, discover their sad condition.

Old Donald Bell, an ancient servitor of the family, was already in sight, trotting briskly along the little platform, trying to catch the carriage that held his young master. In another moment the grey head was in at the window, and the old hand eagerly unfastening the door.

"Ay, Mr. Ahlec, but I'm glaad to see ye!" exclaimed Donald Bell, with the most affectionate welcome in his old voice. "And Meestress Cruthers, she's been just a-wearying and a-wearying for the sight of ye, puir leddy!"

"How are they all, Bell?" asked Alec, as he alighted. His voice sounded, even to himself, quite hollow and unnatural.

"Ay! They're weel, Mr. Ahlec, they're weel! And Meestress Cruthers will be waiting with the carriage. But you're not looking just yoursel'; you're nae sae gae stoot!"

"I'm tired: my head aches," said Alec truly with a weary enough air. And

leaving Donald Bell to see that the luggage was safely stowed away into the smart little cart that had been sent from Muirhead for it, he crossed the line, and with many a greeting from the station people, he passed the wicket, and found the Muirhead landau, and his mother's hand stretched out to greet him.

"What a laang, laang time you've been away! We've just been wearying for you, darling!" Mrs. Carruthers exclaimed, leaning over the door of the carriage, and kissing her son, her only son, as he stood on the steps. "And your train's late, too! I've been here a fearful time!"

The kind, familiar words that he was so used to, they were dreadful to him now; they came too near his hurt! He took his place in the carriage beside his mother, asking drearily—

"How are you all?"

"Pretty well; but, Ahlec dear, what

ails you?" said his mother, turning anxiously to him as they drove off together.

"My head aches," said Alec, with that painfully vague, groping way of his when in distress.

If only his mother would let him creep into the sedges for the shelter of which he so much longed! But no, she went on with fond reproof:—

"You didn't get lunch, then? You just can't go without your proper food. You shouldn't, dear!"

"I had something," said Alec.

"Ay; just a sandwich, maybe. You don't half take care of yourself."

"True! I am an idiot, a fool; I always was one!" said Alec quite quietly, but in so hurt a tone that his mother spoke no more, except to herself, to whom she remarked: "What ails Ahlec? Can he have fallen out with those dreadful Bayliss people? No such good fortune,

I fear! They would never leave go of him; trust them for that. If there is one woman on the face of the earth who is objectionable to me, Mrs. Bayliss is that woman! Alison is well enough; I have nothing to say against her, except that she is that woman's daughter; but she is no match for my boy. I do hope he hasn't let them draw him in!"

Mrs. Carruthers of Muirhead, an elderly woman, with a good deal of simple personal dignity, who would have been rather good-looking if she had been able to have preserved anything at all like a complexion, held that Mrs. Bayliss and her daughter were, after all, but human vampires, who, having once fastened upon the young heir of a wealthy family, would never leave him while the remotest chance of marrying him remained. Indeed, this devoted mother had so high an opinion of her son's merits and position, that it would have been all but impossible

for her to believe that any girl, any *sane* girl, in a lower position than that of an earl's daughter, could deliberately refuse him.

Had Alec given her a verbatim account of his conversation with Alison Bayliss, Mrs. Carruthers would only have listened with incredulity to the narrative, and then have said slowly but incisively: "There'll be just a wee bit more in that than meets the eye. You'll find it out some day, Ahlec, my dear."

But Mrs. Carruthers was a wise woman; she knew better than most when not to speak. So the mother and son drove side by side through the grave twilight, in a silence only broken by the ringing of the horses' hoofs, the occasional hoot of an owl, or the tinkle of a sheep-bell.

On they drove, first through narrow by-lanes, between meadows and turnip-fields; then over three miles or so of as fine a hard highway as is to be

found in the kingdom; past plantations, gloomy, now that the colour was fast fading into darkness, with spruce and fir; between great open spaces revealing low distant hills, dim and lonely in the solitude of the ever-deepening gravity of the evening. Alec felt it, felt the loneliness, the solitude, the night stealing over everything, and the deeper loneliness, the darker night gathering over his own heart.

They left the road and crossed a broad moor, where most solemn purples and deepest gold still lingered on the far-off horizon, beyond the long stretches of heather, among which, here and there, a patch of water shone darkly luminous under the evening sky.

Alec Carruthers had loved these desolations from his earliest childhood; he had craved hungrily for his moors often and often, whenever he had been away from them long together. Now the sight of them, and their strange, unuttered sympathy,

their loneliness, their solemnity, touched him so tenderly, so deeply, that he could feel his heart weeping within him, although his eyes were dry.

Instinct would have made him fling himself on to the broad bosom of his mother-earth, and sob there, as, doubtless, many a half-savage ancestor of his own had done on those very moors. But the uncontrolled emotion of primitive man has passed away with him, and custom made Alec Carruthers sit quietly enough beside the human mother, whose whole being was bound up in his happiness, but to whom he could not then utter a sound.

Presently, at one end of the wide moor, the densely wooded hill on which stood Muirhead rose into view. After a while they came to a handsome red sandstone lodge, with the initials of Alec's father, and the date of its erection, 1878, carved over the door, but all now scarcely discernable in the fast waning light.

The gates were already wide open; Carruthers of Muirhead himself was standing outside, waiting for his son. He was visible enough; for a massive man, over six feet high, and broad in proportion was the laird. He wore a strong tweed shooting-suit, with thick outside seams, that added to his size; a large Tam O'Shanter covered his stubborn, wiry, iron-grey hair, and half a dozen dogs of all sorts yelped around him.

"How are you, lad? how are you?" His strong voice rang out with a hearty welcome in the clear air. No need for him to say in words how glad he was that Alec had come back.

"How are you?" was Alec's reply as the carriage stopped, and the laird's huge hand seized his son's.

The father's ear detected the hollowness of the tone in an instant, and Carruthers of Muirhead did what was rare indeed for him to do—he opened the carriage door

and sprang in. As a rule, he was obstinate about driving anywhere. He had been standing waiting at his gates a good half-hour, with his watch in his hand, stamping up and down with an impatience that he did not care to conceal; but he would not allow himself to be driven over to the station, neither would he drive himself, because he hated any machine on wheels, and was principled against what he hated; nor would he ride, because then Alec's horse would have to be taken too, and Alec would be tired; nor would he walk, for a similar reason. So, eager as he had been to see his son, there he had waited. It was like him—the sort of thing he habitually did in trifles, or in matters of life and death. It was his way.

His wife knew what his getting into her carriage meant, but she said nothing; he might have got out again if she had; there was no knowing.

Alec moved, as if to give his father the

place of honour next his mother. Alec never forgot these domestic courtesies.

"No, no; sit you still, sit you still!" said Carruthers, laying his mighty hand on his son's arm.

"Ahlec will be just a wee bit tired. He had nothing but a sandwich at Normanton," explained Mrs. Carruthers.

"Why will you do it? why will you do it, Ahlec?" cried his father. "Why will you neglect your feed?"

"Oh, I'm all right, father," said Alec, making a gallant effort to rouse himself. "I've just the headache, that's all."

How fond they were of him, those two! Poor Alec! He was overburdened with the love that was lavished upon him. It was shocking to him, then, not to be able to show some return for it; even in the keen northern air he felt half stifled with it. Never before had he felt the affection of others to be a burden to him. Now it seemed a weight unbearable. To get away

from it, to hide himself from it among the bracken and heather on the moors, was an impulse that it was all he could do to resist.

But it never occurred to him that he himself had tried to oppress Alison with a weight of love that had forced her to get free of him at any price. It did not strike him that she had been as frantically eager to escape from him as he now was to get away from all who cared for him. He only knew that he had aimed at her his one strong arrow, and it had fallen at his own feet as limply as if it had never been aimed at all. He only knew his words, "I love you!" had made no mark, had met with no response. He had put all his heart in those words. How his whole soul had gone out to her with them! And she had simply talked him down, then proudly warned him off. This was how it seemed to him.

How could he think of anything except his desperate hurt? How appear delighted

to see his home again? How be other than oppressed by his parents' care for him?

Terrible indeed is the pressure of a great affection when the beloved one has not an equal weight of love on which to sustain it! While there is a simple liking or gentle affection in one heart all is well, so long as the other shows a corresponding, or only slightly increased amount of the same feeling. Surrounded by an atmosphere buoyant as that of a clear summer day, the gentle liking or mild affection may grow apace—Alison's for Alec would most probably have done so; but let the surrounding atmosphere become on a sudden heavily charged with a strong and passionate love, the poor little immature affection, at the first touch of a pressure it feels it cannot resist, takes alarm; a dreaded horror, like unto the horrors of the Black Hole of Calcutta, or of the *Peine forte et dure*, seizes it. Then—smash the windows! Tear down the doors! Air!

air! anything for air, and the power to breathe freely, for liberty at any price!

But, I repeat, it did not occur to Alec Carruthers, even when he himself felt that he must spring out of the carriage to escape from his parents' love, that he had put too sudden a pressure upon Alison Bayliss.

Over a mile or more of private road they went, gradually ascending through dark woods of native conifers, then winding through the hill-side grounds, amid foreign trees of giant growth, the pride of Carruther's heart, until at last they reached a broad lawn, and saw lights gleaming here and there in the great new house that clustered around the ancient, ivy-covered border tower, and Alec Carruthers was at home, in the home that had been so carefully planned all for him.

But all he knew that evening was that he was miserably, abjectly poor, as he had been ever since Alison had fled away from

his love. What of the wide, beautiful house, the smile of welcome everywhere, the soft carpets on the great staircase, the evidence of wealth, of care for his smallest comfort, that met him on every hand? He hardly noticed them at all; he only knew that he was poor—miserably poor—but must try to appear as if he had a mine of wealth to lavish on his people.

For him the household laws, rigid, generally, as those of Medes and Persians, had been broken. Dinner, that centre of their domestic life, had been set aside, and a cosy meal combining supper and tea substituted.

The usual dignified distance between the three had been much curtailed; but even that hardly suited the laird's notion of a truly domestic welcome to his boy, for, seizing the chair that had been placed for him, he brought it up close to the head of the table, where his wife was sitting, with a hearty "There now, that's right! That's

something like!" as Alec followed his example, and drew his chair to the opposite side. The three, sitting there so near together, made a pleasant little island of simple domesticity in the ocean of wide and, except at the table, dimly lighted room. The scarcely visible family portraits seemed to look down at the little group with approval.

Alec, by a desperate effort, managed to talk in his usual slow fashion about the Sussex people with whom he had been staying. He made what to most of his friends would have seemed more of a good story of it than was at all usual with him; but the keen-eyed parents were not to be deceived; they saw the effort to please.

Alec retired early. His father followed him into the hall, and, buttonholing him there, entreated him to say if anything were the matter.

"Just the headache," said Alec. "I'll be all right in the morning; pray don't be

uneasy about me. I'll come down right enough in the morning, you'll see." And he forced a dismal smile as he held out his hand, and again said, "Good night!"

Carruthers of Muirhead was a powerful man and a tall; but those who knew him well predicted, that if anything were to happen to Alec, they would not give that mighty father more than a year in which to follow his son. Carruthers, or "Muirhead," as he was as often called, strode across the room to his wife's chair.

"What ails yon lad?" he asked abruptly, fixing the eyes that gleamed under his great shaggy brows firmly upon her face, with eager inquiry.

"Poor boy!" said his wife. "He's just in love!"

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT OF GEAR.

"WHAT ails yon lad?" Carruthers of Muirhead had demanded of his wife on the evening of Alec's return, after his parting with Alison.

"Poor boy! He's just in love!" had been the response; and both parents had expected Alec would be himself again in a day or two.

They were disappointed.

"Well, I've read in the Scriptures of a dumb devil," said Carruthers, at the close of an anxious fortnight, "but I have never just understood it before. I do believe Ahlec's possessed of one now!"

"He'll mend! he'll mend, my dear,

and be all the better for it," said Mrs. Carruthers in her slow accents, which generally had a more or less soothing effect upon her husband. "Wait a while, my dear; it will come right. You should just be patient with the poor boy. I am sure he just tries his hardest to do what he's told to do."

"What he's told! Yes, I'm just weary of telling him what to do; it's like speaking to a mere machine!"

So saying, Carruthers of Muirhead took his huge presence off to his gun-room, leaving his wife cutting out charity work with a great pair of scissors.

"Have you seen yon since breakfast?" asked Carruthers, returning after a few minutes, and putting his great head in at the door.

"No," replied his wife, carefully folding a length of grey shirting. "But, my dear, don't worry about him. I'm keeping my eyes on him; he's all right."

"Humph! Then I wish he were all wrong, that's all I can say. I'll just go out and look for him."

"Pray, leave him alone; you'll drive him wild. Go and write your letters," said Mrs. Carruthers, pinning the brown-paper pattern of a shirt yoke on to the material she had folded, without looking up at her husband.

"Just put down that wretched stuff, and come out with me," said Carruthers, who, accustomed to a domestic life of clock-work regularity, could settle comfortably to nothing as soon as the home machine was in the slightest out of gear.

His restlessness was giving his wife a good deal of trouble just now, and, instead of taking himself off for the whole morning together, either to his letters, his farm, his stables, or his fishing, he was as conspicuous by his constant presence as his son was by his absence. He was, in fact, in that state of mind when a man requires

the whole and undivided attention of his wife, and when he is frantically jealous of whatever has the audacity to attempt to share it with him.

He hated the grey shirting vehemently. He would have liked to bundle it up and throw it behind the fire in the Abbotsford stove, which a few days of chilly rain made necessary in the early morning, although by the calendar it was now July. In the early days of his married life, Carruthers of Muirhead had done such things; but now his wife had other ways of managing him than by opposing his wishes. Mrs. Carruthers, therefore, although her fingers were itching to be at the grey shirting, rose at once, took her husband's arm, went with him into the broad hall, got down a brown straw hat from the stand, while her husband carefully draped a black shawl around her shoulders.

This done, and the weather then "fairing," they went strolling together along

the fine, hard terrace, and through the grounds, in search of the missing heir, whose mother knew perfectly well where to find him.

Indeed, since Alec's return from London, that young man had employed his waking hours in the simplest manner possible: he either was out on the moors for many hours at a time, or he was stretched full-length on his own sofa, in his own sitting-room, with his face to a quarter of a yard of dado, composed of lemons with their leaves and blossoms, which he contemplated until he loathed them, but from which he parted reluctantly when the great gong boomed through the house, or a young man visitor was announced. He was on his sofa then, as his mother knew quite well, therefore, they did not find him in the grounds.

An hour later his father came into his wife's morning room, and reported that he had "seen yon"—he did not mention

his son's name, but pointed over his shoulder—he had "seen you, skulking down by the salmon pool, with his hands in his pockets,' which will be all in holes by this time, I take it." Mrs. Carruthers, hearing this, cautiously stole upstairs, and examined her son's private apartments, those large, handsome rooms, on the first floor, so conspicuously more spacious than the many rather narrow guest-chambers of Muirhead. The utter neatness of these rooms was really shocking; they looked quite uninhabited. There was never a book awry on the shelves now; and in days gone by, well-worn volumes used to litter even the floor: there was no scrap of torn paper in the Japanese baskets, no used pen on the desk, not even a chair out of its place. The straight, cushionless sofa, with the strong springs, never betrayed its master; so he went out, and left no trace behind him.

His rooms seemed so untenanted his

mother felt almost inclined to cry, as she turned into the corridor and faced the great window that lighted the wide, shining pitch-pine staircase—the great window, with the little squares of brownish-green glass, on which were quaint little designs of birds and beasts and fishes in sepia, which, at one time, had been much praised by Alec. Everything had been planned for Alec; without him Muirhead, to Alec's parents, had scarcely any meaning; it was all for Alec. Alec had been a long while making up his mind whether he would come into this world at all. His parents had waited for him a good many years, and when he came, he did not take kindly to life; he was with difficulty persuaded to stay. But during the last two or three years, after he and Mac, his cousin, had spent a winter at Nice, Alec's health had taken a turn; he had grown comparatively robust. But it was dreadful to Mrs. Carruthers to see his rooms looking

so tenantless. She was a very strong-minded woman on other points—in her dislike to Mrs. Bayliss, for instance—yet, as she turned into the corridor, she felt a strange sinking about her heart, a choking feeling in her throat, and a horrible dread that those rooms might one day be empty for ever.

Her husband, who was restlessly pacing over the Persian carpets and the tiger-skins in the hall, with mighty strides, caught a glimpse of her, and went up the stairs. She returned with him to Alec's apartments. He gave a groan of despair, then hushed his voice and his footsteps, as if in a sick-room.

They stole quietly about the place, fearing every minute Alec might come in and find them there; then they cautiously retired. They had discovered nothing—no letter, no clue to the real cause of their son's distress.

"He'll be thinking we don't like the

girl; and he wants to marry her," said Carruthers, as he followed his wife into her morning room, and shut the door behind him.

"I've no objection to the girl," said Mrs. Carruthers; "it's her mother I detest; but——"

"Oh, the girl's a decent body enough, and her people are decent people enough, although it's not just the match we have planned for the lad! I'm not going to have my boy killed because you detest the girl's mother! If he wants to marry her, let him marry her at once, and have done with it."

"You'll not need to be anxious about him just yet," said Mrs. Carruthers, trying to conceal her own doubts under a calm, almost cold manner.

"Not anxious! What are you talking about? When the boy's just the ghost of what he was a month ago! Let him marry her if he wants to marry her, I say.

Settle it at once. I'll not sleep till it's settled! I'll tackle him as soon as I see him again."

"You'd better let me, my dear," observed Mrs. Carruthers.

"Heugh! you'll just go humbugging about and not do it!" exclaimed the impatient giant.

It was a great grief to him that his son had so little of his own vitality. Carruthers of Muirhead was rather an exaggerated being himself; a man of ordinary size and strength seemed to him puny. Alec appeared to him to be made of egg-shell china. It was an idea he had run his own great head against so forcibly, that it had lodged deeply in his brain, and having lodged there, no human ingenuity would ever remove it without, at the same time, removing that brain. He was afraid that even his wife would hardly be able to handle Alec's heart without breaking it, and although he had boldly

stated that he meant himself to tackle his son, no sooner had the words escaped him than he became painfully conscious of the immense size of his own sunburnt, hairy paws. Angry and disgusted with himself and the world in general, after a short silence he turned abruptly to leave the room, saying as he did so—

"Well, make it all right! Settle it at once! I can't stand this upset of everything any longer. Settle it at once, and let's get quiet again."

Thankful for the permission, but with more than one "I just detest that woman in London!" Mrs. Carruthers proceeded to try to catch her son. That was not so very difficult, as nowadays he never entered the house by the front door, which always stood open, but stole in by the little side passage, gay with encaustic tiles, on the walls of which hung his own and his father's fishing-boots and waders, and which lead straight to

the gun-room on the ground floor of that old ivy-covered border tower, around which the present red sandstone house had grown up—the house that was, to quote Alison Bayliss, "So good an example of ancient and modern." All Mrs. Carruthers did, therefore, was to sit in the gun-room with the door open, watching the tiled passage between the mackintoshes and fishing-gear.

After about half an hour's waiting and stocking-knitting, Alec appeared. He stepped as quietly along the passage as he could, his hands deep buried in his pockets, evidently intending to steal up to his sofa unobserved. His mother stepped out of the gun-room, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Alec, my dear!" she said fondly.

"Yes, mater!" he returned politely, but as if fearful of detention and anxious for escape.

"I want to speak to you, dear!"

"Yes," said Alec in a level tone.

"Come in here."

He obeyed. "What is it?" he asked, with ill-concealed impatience, as his mother closed the gun-room door.

"Sit down, dear," said Mrs. Carruthers.

"No, thanks. What is it you want to tell me, mater?" asked Alec. His tone added, "Pray be quick, and let me go."

"Your father and I are very anxious about you; you seem so unhappy. We have thought that it was about Alison Bayliss. We have thought you were troubling yourself because you knew we did not fancy it was just the best match for you; we——"

"That is not the case, mother," said Alec with decision.

"I only wanted to tell you that, of course, you must act for yourself in such a matter. We know we can trust you. We will accept your choice."

"Thanks. Have you anything else to

say, mother?" he asked, trying to speak kindly.

"No, dear; I thought I would just tell you this," said Mrs. Carruthers, as if making an apology for troubling him on the subject.

Alec turned to go.

"Your father and I, we are so—so——" and Mrs. Carruthers again laid her hand on his arm, and tried to detain him, as she looked up anxiously in his face, and saw that his deep-set eyes were clouded, as if by tears that would never fall.

He bent and kissed her.

"Won't you tell me, dear? We might —perhaps we might be able to help you," she pleaded.

"No one can. I will try not to worry you more. Never speak of it again, mother. I will try to do my duty," said Alec with heart-broken fortitude, and he slunk away up to his own rooms.

Mrs. Carruthers found her husband

pacing up and down the terrace like a caged lion.

"Well?" he asked abruptly, as he stopped short on seeing her.

"I just can't make him out," said Mrs. Carruthers abjectly.

"Did you tell him he could marry the girl if he liked?" demanded her husband fiercely.

"Yes, of course I did. He said no one could help him. Can it be possible she has refused him?"

"Refused him—refused Ahlec! Refused my son! What are you talking about?" exclaimed Carruthers of Muirhead, aghast at the notion.

"She has; I feel sure she has!" returned Mrs. Carruthers, quite calmly.

"I can't believe it! I won't believe it!" and having uttered these words, he added, "I'll go and speak to him myself!" And then, with this terrible threat, he snapped to his great mouth, as if resolved

never again to open it. Muirhead strode into the hall, and made for the stairs at the top of his speed, his wife meekly following him. He turned sharply round upon her. "What are you dogging me for?" he asked, knitting his brows still more fiercely than ever.

Mrs. Carruthers quietly slipped into her morning room, where she listened breathlessly. But she felt pretty sure that for all his bluster her husband would as soon try to jump from the top of Muirhead to the Solway as open his son's door with that question about Alison on his lips. She was right; he did not go upstairs. She heard him boiling and foaming with rage as he pounded heavily about the house; but presently he put his head in at her door, and announced that he had not spoken to "yon" yet, and would just wait a while. He went and paced about for another quarter of an hour longer; then he returned and said abruptly—

"Send for Nona Adair!"

"My love, he just hates her!" exclaimed his wife.

"So much the better! so much the better! Send for Nona Adair, I say! Love and hate are precious near each other, I can tell you! Send for Nona Adair! That's a girl worth the looking at! Send for Nona Adair, I say; and don't lose time about it! For heaven's sake, let's get settled again! I can't stand being out of gear any longer! I've had enough of this! Nona Adair will do it! She has a head screwed on her shoulders the right way. Send for Nona Adair, I say! Do you hear, now? Send for Nona Adair at once!"

"My dear! my dear! my dear!" protested Mrs. Carruthers, in a crescendo of astonishment.

"Don't 'my dear' me; do as I tell you. Send for Nona Adair! This business has just to be settled, and she'll be the girl to do it."

"I just doubt it," said Mrs. Carruthers, in her slowest and most sing-song tones.

"I don't!" said her husband, with another strong snap of his powerful jaw.

"Well, well; I'll just drive over to Hitherbie after lunch. Maybe Nona will be able to stay here a while before the shooting, when the people who are with her now have gone. I'll drive over, my dear, and see if she can come then."

"Ay!" ejaculated Carruthers, with returning composure—"ay!"

"Perhaps you'll come with me?" suggested the wife.

"No, no; that's going a bit too far!" returned the husband, as if amused at the idea. He went off comparatively soothed, and was in a remarkably good temper during the trying time of lunch, although Alec maintained at table that absolute silence that had more than once or twice since his son's return irritated Carruthers of Muirhead beyond endurance.

Alec retired to his sedges again as soon as the meal was over, and he stayed in his own room until about ten minutes after his mother's carriage had left Muirhead, when well-known sounds told him that his father was starting to ride after her. He watched his father's horse until it was lost among the trees, and then he quietly stole downstairs, with a basket in his hand, and a most curious and very "mixed" sort of expression on his face.

A few minutes later, one of the underlings fled away from the conservatory at the top of his speed, in search of the head gardener.

"Wild wark! wild wark!" he exclaimed. "There's Meester Ahlec's clean daft! All your next year's blossoms are just gone the noo! Mak' haste! mak haste! Ay, it's wild wark, wild wark! Ye'll be just too late, John Moss!"

John Moss hurried up as fast as his legs would carry him, but the damage was done

long before he could reach the conservatory "Ay, but yon's in love!" he exclaimed, when the first outburst of horror and dismay was over—"in love, like the very de'il hisself!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ALEC'S PEACE-OFFERING.

By one of those coincidences, so strange, and yet so familiar to all of us, Alec Carruthers made an important discovery at the very same time, on the very same Friday morning as that on which Alison Bayliss read the great blue capitals on the notice-board of St. Mary Aldermary, which made her aware of the existence of a certain Reverend Basil Penrose, who was the rector of a Suffolk parish, and who was to preach at a City church the following Sunday.

After Alec had spoken to his mother in the lobby, he had gone to his rooms, feeling certain, as he had told Mrs. Carruthers,

that no one could help him. He walked up and down for some time, looking, had any one been there to see him, the picture of misery, his head drooping, his hands in his pockets. Now and then his hidden right hand clutched at something. It was a mere nervous movement; he neither knew what his fingers were doing, nor what they were grasping.

After a while, however, unconscious cerebration led up to conscious memory. He remembered—all at once, it seemed to him—that he was then wearing a coat he had not before put on since his return from London. In an instant it also flashed upon him that the paper he had been heedlessly crushing in his pocket had been given him by Alison Bayliss.

"Good heavens!" he cried in dismay, as in desperate haste he pulled out a little pamphlet. "I've been tearing up a book she gave me!"

A devout Catholic, who had caught

himself in a gross act of wilful sacrilege, could not have been more horrified. There in his hand, as he pulled it out of his pocket, lay the little pamphlet, all crumpled, dog-eared, and out of shape, crushed by Alec's own fingers! The sacred little book her eyes had read, her fingers touched, her heart and mind pondered, was now a mere wreck of paper.

Alec was horror-stricken that he, who loved her so passionately, should have treated anything she had given him with such insult; it was too dreadful! Yet he knew he had done even worse. From the moment she had given it him until the present, he had never once thought of it at all; it was still unread. "The brute, the fool I have been!" he exclaimed, as soon as his horror of his deed allowed him to frame a thought or word. "This, this, is a type of the way I have treated all she cares for!—and I expected her to

love me! Oh, there never was such a fool in the world before!"

He took the crushed pamphlet to the table, smoothed it out with an eager, despairing tenderness, that was as pathetic as a mother's caressings of the child she has hurt by accident. What remorse he felt as he bent over the ruined leaves and tried to straighten them! How clearly he recalled Alison's expression as she had given him the pamphlet! "Here is the Report of our little Mission. Perhaps you won't mind looking through it? It is very short." That is what she had said. He could hear her words now; she had spoken shyly, as if half wishing to secure his interest in her work, and half afraid of boring him.

"Oh, my darling, my good, sweet darling! And this is how I have treated you! I have crushed what you cared for! I've just forgotten its existence, in thinking of you. The fool, the brute I am!"

But the practical side of Alec's nature soon began to assert itself. When he had smoothed out the leaves as well as he could, he sat down and steadily read them through, in spite of the continual interruptions of his love and his remorse.

Towards the end of the Report came an account of the Flower Mission, which he knew was one of Alison's pet schemes, but towards which he had never yet sent so much as a daisy or harebell, nor one of the hundreds of roses that were blooming and fading in the Muirhead gardens.

"The hampers arrive at the Schoolroom on Saturday mornings," he read. It was Friday then. The discovery Alec made was, that here was an excellent opportunity for sending at once a peace-offering to Alison and a contribution to her Mission. It was the first ray of hope that had come to him. It roused him to vigorous and immediate action.

As soon as his parents had left home,

down to the conservatories Alec went, feeling that nothing but the costliest gifts would atone for his past neglect; and there he cut and slashed away, for the first time in his life, and made such havoc before Moss, the head gardener, had time to stop him, that, as poor Moss declared, it would be two years, if not three, before the wild work of those few minutes would be repaired. How costly the offering was, Moss could estimate better than Alec. Alec only knew it was far too poor for Alison.

He packed the blossoms—white were many of them—carefully in a little hamper, which he addressed :—

"*For the Flower Mission.*
"Miss Alison Bayliss,
"Trinity Square,
"Tower Hill, E.C.
"From Muirhead."

Then he went round to the stables, had

his horse saddled, and rode down to Kirkhope, the nearest town, with his offering.

Would she accept it? For the Mission, oh yes—that or any other gift! But as sent to herself? Would she know his meaning? Would she be pleased? Would she write a line of thanks? What would come of it? One thing, certainly, if nothing else. He would leave his sedges; he would set earnestly to work on objects that interested her. How he thought of her and of his offering all through the long day! How he dreamed of her, and of seeing her in peace again during the grave, lingering twilight!

Ah! It was in that same twilight that Alison sat listening to Basil Penrose discoursing on the Moneyers of the Tower of London. It was when that same grave and lingering twilight had all faded away that Alison rushed back, flushed and breathless, to cry, while the sudden tears of unutterable disappointment welled up

in her eyes, as she saw Basil was no longer there: "Gone!"

Alec knew nothing of all this—how should he?—but he woke up in the night and thought of the train, in which his flowers were rushing through England in the dark, rushing always nearer to Alison; and he refused to believe that he and she were parted for ever. Will she keep one little blossom for herself? Only one? It was a reward he hardly dared hope for; yet he hoped for it, for hope had sprung up anew and vigorously in his heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR HIS WORK'S SAKE.

"GONE!"

Mrs. Bayliss heard her daughter's exclamation, and guaged the depth of feeling that prompted it very accurately.

"That young man described himself only too truly in his wretched burlesque sketch," she said, without raising her eyes from the just-arrived letter she was reading. "He's a perfect fiend!"

"But what a dear fiend!" The sentence rushed unbidden to Alison's lips, and struggled for utterance there, tempting her to cast filial respect to the winds, and to throw back the term defiantly at her mother. But her maidenly

reserve held it back; she could not suffer the word "dear" to escape her, so she stood still, near the door, fighting her excitement, until at length she could trust herself to speak; then she said, unsteadily enough—

"Mother, here is your work;" and, moving to the table, she laid down a carefully folded little heap of lace and muslin. "From Birrendale again!" she cried, her glance falling on the envelope of the letter as she put down the lace, thankfully snatching at a new subject that might help her to hide her agitation; wondering all the while, "How could he go without saying good-bye to me? How could he go? Ah, it was nothing to him to go; but to me——" And again that bitter "gone!" would come back sobbing to her heart. She could hear it, if no one else could.

"From Birrendale—yes!" said Mrs. Bayliss, frowning at the letter. "More

grumbling; I'm really sick and tired of the whole affair! However, I don't much care now. I'll take no further trouble about these people, and I'll never let the place to strangers again, if I can only get rid of them. House property is one continual worry. I've had too much annoyance already. Cauld-knowe will suit Mac and Jessie admirably. I shan't mind taking a lower rent from them. In fact, I've just made up my mind to let the tenants know at once that, as their term is expiring, it is not my intention to renew it. I should greatly prefer Cauld-knowe to be occupied by one of the family."

"But I should like to stay with Jessie sometimes," put in Alison, foreseeing banishment to Scotland, proximity to Alec Carruthers, and other horrors in her mother's sudden decision. It was a foolish thing to say; Alison was always putting in the right word at the wrong place.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Bayliss, "you must see Jessie a good deal; and remember, Alison, that Cauld-knowe will one day be yours. It is only right you should stay there sometimes. You must learn to feel you belong to the county; you must know all the people; you must——"

"Well, Jessie isn't there yet," said Alison wearily.

Cauld-knowe was only four or five miles from Muirhead, no distance by Birrendale measurement. Mac and Alec had always been like brothers; if Mac were at Cauld-knowe, Alec would be there every day. Alison hoped it would be a long while before she saw Alec and Birrendale again. She had felt pretty safe with strangers occupying her mother's house by the Birren; but with Mac and Jessie as tenants, how changed everything would be! "Am I to be sent to Cauld-knowe? I won't go!" she determined at once.

"I want you to think of Cauld-knowe as your future home," continued Mrs. Bayliss. "When Uncle John and I are gone, and you are the literary old maid you have determined to be, you will, I dare say, like to live there alone, with your pen and your cat. Nice, quiet place to write in, my dear!"

One can concentrate as much stinging power in an affectionate epithet as can be put into the common, domestic kiss; which is, as many people know, a good deal. The acridness of that last "my dear" was so pungent, that Alison instantly thought of the Christian duty of forgiveness, and hastily produced and applied the "coals of fire" she thought most appropriate.

"When you go, mother, you had better take me with you," she said gently, and retired into a remote corner of the sofa with her knitting.

Mrs. Bayliss was silent. The coals of

fire did their work well. The mother would have liked to take her Alison in her arms and kiss her, but she knew such expressions of affection don't do; so she did not follow her instinct, but read and re-read her letter a great many times instead.

As for Alison, a new terror loomed before her, as she sat in her corner. She might be sent away! It was in vain she told herself she would not go; she knew too well how weak she was when pressure was brought to bear upon her. Her mother had sent her only upstairs, and when she had rushed back he, Basil Penrose, was gone; all was changed. What would happen if she were sent to Birrendale? Why, the very Tower itself, and all it contained—which just then to her might be spelled with the letters that made up his name—why, the very Tower of London itself might vanish during her absence!

It was a possibility too dreadful for contemplation; it gave way to that insidious question that would come cropping to the surface however deeply she might bury it. "Why does he call me the lady with the red, red roses, if he was not struck that day with them and with me?"

Ah, she knew! She remembered Uncle John's observant eye had noticed how well they went with her neutral-tinted dress! It was only that! It was a little artistic effect that had been produced without any thought of her own that she was aware of, so he recurred to it as one recurs to a picture that pleases one. That was all.

But was it all? What of the subtle flattery of tone and manner that singled her out from every one else, and gave her a significant and picturesque individuality —a new being? She saw herself, "the lady of the red, red roses," a subject for a picture or a poem; not the girl whose mediocre charms had hitherto been quite

overshadowed by Jessie's acknowledged beauty. It was a dangerously flattering vision, that vision of herself idealized and made lovely; but dangerously charming as that was, it was as nothing compared to the tone, so like a caress, in which he told her that he held the key of her mind as well as of her heart: "But you were thinking of Raymond Lully?"

She saw the little scene again. She looked at it as if it were a picture; and yet, how it made every pulse tingle! She saw with her mind's eye things invisible; she saw the caress that was all word, air, thought, emotion. Could she, indeed, have been that girl? Could that girl on the window-settle be herself? Herself! Why, there she was—she who was herself (she pressed her knitting-needle against the palm of her hand to assure herself she was not dreaming; she felt it; she knew she was awake)—there she was, sitting in a corner of the sofa, knitting a pair of

homely stockings for some poor urchin living in those dreadful streets down behind the Mint! Herself? How could it be herself? And yet—ah, yes! yes! yes! it was! She herself was that girl—that girl to whom Basil was speaking! Then, why had he left her without one parting word?

And had he really come there that evening to see Uncle John, or was Uncle John only the excuse? "Excuse!" she said indignantly, angry with herself for the mere suggestion. "He never makes excuses! If he said he came to see Uncle John, it was Uncle John he wanted to see!" So she told herself, but yet it seemed to her he had very willingly turned back with them; why, then, had he gone so abruptly?

How he excited that curiosity, that wish to explore, of hers, which was always so strong! When he talked, it was like a new, wide country, full of strange interests to her. Even the dear familiar Tower she

knew so well, glowed in a fresh light to her since Basil Penrose had talked of the old Moneyers and Assay Masters. Ah, how thoroughly he knew her mind, her enthusiasm! He had even remembered that she had once spoken of Lully and the making of gold.

And she? No, she did not know his; his was a mystery to her. She could not tell always whether he were speaking in jest or in earnest; but—yes, this one thing, at least, was clear to her, and that alone was a straight cut to her pity and admiration—he was poor, poor for the sake of principle! And that principle itself was right in her eyes, however unorthodox his views might be. "How few can dare to be poor! I know what poverty is! It is noble of him to be poor for the sake of principle!"

There was an audacious resolve burning in her heart, growing every moment stronger and stronger and stronger. She

would help him! She, densely ignorant, foolish, weak, unused to act for herself in important affairs, as she felt herself to be, she would help him!

She had never yet been able, she told herself, to make a great and sustained literary effort. In fact, she had as yet done next to nothing. She could not do her best for so mean an object as her own success. How could she? It was not in her to do it. "I can't work for myself. I never could," she said. But to help him, what was not possible? Here was a motive strong enough to arouse every fraction of her latent power.

Uncle John came home presently from his Mansion House banquet; he told them of the best and worst things of the evening.

Mrs. Bayliss, in her daughter's presence, said not a word either of the visitor or of the Birrendale letter.

Alison slipped away as early as possible, but not to sleep. The sun was streaming

in at the windows, the fish-carts were tearing down to Billingsgate, before she quite lost consciousness. Did she think of Alec once? Never once!

But she was up in good time, that radical wildness and untidiness of hers she so constantly bewailed, and felt that morning more keenly than ever, carefully hidden under an exterior neat as a new pin, or as her stiff linen collar. She could not help smiling at herself in the glass. "I do indeed add hypocrisy to my many other vices!" she said, laughing as she remembered the tangle of odds and ends in every drawer in her room, the turmoil of thoughts and feelings, the jumble of everything she possessed—that jumble out of which she had resolved to make something that should help Basil Penrose in that great scientific discovery which was to hand down his name to remotest posterity, and to be such an unspeakable blessing to the world at large! Caroline

Herschell was now her heroine—Caroline Herschell, who had ground lenses for her brother; only Basil Penrose should never know who had ground his lenses for him!

As soon as she had brushed Uncle John's hat, and seen him safely pass the baize door that divided their private apartments from the premises of John Harbuckle and Co., she went upstairs to that den at the top of the house which she and the old bachelor now shared.

"I don't mind your writing here, Alison," her uncle had more than once said to her. "I don't mind your being here; indeed, it is a pleasure to me during business hours to feel you are here. I like you to come here. You never try to tidy me up; it is so good of you, my dear."

"Tidy you up, indeed! I should think not!" had always been Alison's reply. "I hope I'm not quite such a shocking Philistine as to make the attempt. I wouldn't

tidy you up for all the money in the Royal Mint over yonder!"

"I've every confidence in you, my dear, every confidence! I'm sure you'd be walled up within my papers sooner than move one."

"I expect to be lost among them some day, Uncle John, like the man's hat was among Count Cavour's official documents, you know. Well, if I'm missing, you'll always know where to find me, won't you?"

John Harbuckle's den at the top of the George the First house, in the north-west angle of Tower Hill, was a "chaos" such as would have charmed that greatest of all den-masters, the late Bishop Thirwall. It wanted size; the bishop's familiar cat was not to be found on its hearthrug, but every drawer in the old bureau overflowed with prints and papers. A large, unassorted library stood, or lay, or leaned on the shelves that lined the walls; there were

books on the table, under the table, on the chairs, under the chairs, on the floor, singly, and in piles; while in an adjoining apartment was a small but choice collection of old furniture and bric-à-brac, such as would have gladdened the hearts of the world-famed auctioneers of King Street, St. James.

It was among the books and papers that Alison had been permitted to place a little table, which she had chosen out of the lumber on account of the strength of its legs and the number of its drawers. At this table Alison seated herself on the morning after Basil Penrose's twilight visit. Beyond the pen and ink, and the slope on which she wrote, the top of the table wa unoccupied.

She had nothing on hand, Jessie's things having taken up all her time for the six months before the wedding. She had written nothing since, in demonstrating the "criminality" of Madame Herzog's song, Basil Penrose had also demonstrated

to her her profound ignorance of everything. If she had heard him ask, "Who is that uneducated woman?" she could hardly have been more effectually quelled or lowered in her own eyes.

But in the fever and excitement of the past night, she had seen visions and dreamed dreams; possibilities, unthought of before, danced before her fancy. She would do something. He should never see it; it would not be for such exalted beings as Basil Penrose to read. But ignorant as she knew herself to be, there were thousands, tens of thousands, far more ignorant; among them she would find a public, for them she would write. This was, perhaps, the most really foolish thought that had ever entered that well-balanced little head of hers; and the worst of it was, it did not then strike her as foolish. As she had tossed about during the night, stories, plots, conversations, books by the dozen, had appeared to her, calling out, "Come, write me! come,

write me!" but now, in this clear, bright, work-a-day morning, with the ceaseless noise of the City rising up to her open window, where were they?

She looked at the bare table, at the blotter: they suggested nothing; everything was blank. There was not even a sheet of paper on the desk to tempt her to make a beginning. The feverishness was dying away, the brain was growing weary. She put her elbow on the empty desk, leaned her head on her hand, and gazed vacantly into space.

After a while, her glance fell languidly upon the dry pen on its stand. "My little husband!" The phrase came back to her, suddenly dyeing her face crimson. The hot blush roused her, it stung her to action, it made her furious with herself. "In love!" The thought would come. She seized her pen as if it had been a weapon with which to drive out the intruder. "Nonsense! Stuff! Rubbish! What

utter absurdity! No, no; it's too ridiculous! Interested! interested!

"With outstretched hoe—

Pen, I mean," making a wide sweep in the air with her trusty J—

"With outstretched pen I drove him from the door,
And taught him never to come there no more!

which suggests," she went on, laughing to herself (she was really an excellent companion to herself; if, after all, she were to be an old maid, no one would really pity her)—"which suggests that"—laying down her pen, and forcibly pulling open a very crowded drawer—"I'd better do as Jessie and I did, when we were so fearfully poor in Birrendale; when, if we needed—which we always did—a new garment, we always looked for the foundation of it in the rag-bag. Now, here's my literary rag-bag; let me see if there is anything I can start a three-volume novel upon. Well—oh, here's my little

poem on the Minories: 'The Street of the Little Sisters,'" dipping into a much-worn MS. "I like it, you know"—she had a way of saying "you know" to herself—"and so does Uncle John, and his old friend, Mr. Woolcombe. But, of course, I should never get any money for that sort of thing. Old Mr. Woolcombe, who knows a good deal about publishers, told me poems were never paid for, unless they were by very distinguished authors; then they make lots of money. Besides, nobody except such people as Uncle John's friends would care for such a subject. Now, what was it that Jessie said when I tried to read it to her? Why, I remember. She put her fingers in her ears, and ran away, crying out—

"'"'Tis the voice of the poet; I heard her exclaim:
I have bored you before; I shall bore you again!'

Poor Jessie! That was so like her. Am I really such a horror? A bore! Oh, I hope not. The degradation of being a bore! Perhaps I am, though, because, when

I had succeeded in getting mother to read that 'Street of the Little Sisters,' she looked up into my face with mingled awe and pity, and said: 'You dear, dear misguided child! It's really wonderfully clever! That is, *it's so totally uninteresting!* Who on earth do you think would read it?' Well, somebody has read it, evidently, for it's in a most delightful state of dog-ear now. That's no good," laying it down. "Then here's a paper about the City churches; shall I give up the idea of the novel, and finish this? No; it would take me at least a year to finish it properly, and if I got five pounds for it, I should have to think myself lucky. That won't do! Well"—turning over a number of loose sheets—"I think I never came across such a Dry-as-dust collection! Mother's quite right; people won't read this sort of thing. Yet she cried over Jessie's stupid letter the other day. They will have it, you see; they will have that thing, that sentiment, that

makes the world go round! What, again?" rubbing her cheeks very hard by way of cooling them, silly girl! "After all, I shall have to study Love (I can't bear using that word, even to my own inner consciousness); I'll study it (I really *must* get hardened to these things if I'm ever to get any one to read what I write. And now—now. I must be read, and I must make money). I'll study Love, as a fine art, of course, and —ah, happy thought! *Jessie!* 'Jessie; in three volumes.' Jessie *must be* popular; she always was! With Jessie as a heroine, no novel could fail," such faith had Alison in her cousin as a popular person—the girl for the eleven out of every dozen; not "the type of the unpopular," as she considered herself to be. Put Jessie on paper—what could be easier?—and the book must take with the many. And a novel that took meant—— But Alison had never yet tried the literary money market. How much would it be? Two hundred? Three

hundred? Or—more visions, more dreams! But all for him. No; oh no! *not* for *him*; for his work,—his work up in the Tower turret!

"Alison, dear child, there's a little hamper for your Flower Mission."

Into what far-off regions had she wandered? She came back to earth with a start at the sound of her mother's voice, sprang up, all smiles and blushes, and ran down to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XIX.

FLOWERS AND THEIR MISSIONS.

Alison ran downstairs with the happiest smile lurking about the corners of her mouth, for a certainty that Basil cared for her had taken possession of her heart, and "A little, a little; he cares for me a little!" repeated itself over and over again, like the refrain of a song, as she flew towards Alec's peace-offering. What a sudden check the "From Muirhead" gave her! The colour left her face, the smile her lips; a slight tremor shook her.

Her mother saw it, and was encouraged. In spite of Basil Penrose, Muirhead might still be possible.

"Shall I open the hamper, dear?"

asked Mrs. Bayliss, under her voice, as Alison made no attempt at doing so herself, eager as she generally was to see the contents of any parcel.

Mrs. Bayliss cut the strings, and disclosed those precious blossoms John Moss was, at that moment, so bitterly lamenting. Those at the top were all white, with only a few delicate fronds to relieve their pallor.

Alison looked down gravely at the pure blossoms. At other times, when flowers came, she used to bury her face among them, and breathe in their fragrance as if she never could have enough of it; but these she felt she could not touch. A strange wave of sorrow and remorse passed over her. It was to her, for the moment, as if a coffin-lid had been removed, and although she had seen nothing but the wreaths, she had known too well what they hid.

"How exquisite! Ah, Alison, John

Moss never cut those long stalks!" said her mother.

"They are very lovely," said Alison quietly, then closed the lid and turned away.

It struck Mrs. Bayliss that perhaps, after all, Alison was very much in love with Alec.

Alison felt that the unexpected arrival had betrayed her into showing a change of countenance which she would have given much to have prevented.

"We won't unpack them; they will go to the schoolroom better as they are," she said, with a certain little authoritativeness, most unusual to her.

"But you surely don't mean to throw away those costly flowers on creatures who would sooner have a bunch of daisies!" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss.

"They do not belong to me, mother. They were sent to the Mission."

"I dare say!" said Mrs. Bayliss, with a

rather uneasy laugh. "They were sent to the Mission, plainly enough; but they were as evidently intended for you."

"They were sent to the Mission, mother; and to the Mission they must go. We mustn't retain flowers that don't belong to us," repeated Alison; and she carefully and very seriously fastened the strings, and then moved the little hamper to a corner of the room, where it would be out of the way; which done, she went slowly upstairs again, to John Harbuckle's den, feeling very much depressed.

She could not rally again during the rest of that morning. She was thankful when John Harbuckle came up with a basket of mignonette and scarlet geranium, which one of his friends had brought for the Mission; and she spent some time in tying the flowers up into little nosegays.

After lunch, Alison and Uncle John went out together, he carrying the Muirhead offering, and Alison the basket of nosegays.

As they passed the top of the turning by the now unused "Tower of London" Station of the Underground Railway, Alison looked down it sadly to the grey bit of Old London Wall at the end.

"Ah," she felt, rather than said to herself, "Alec and I came out once to look at that bit of wall! I was very happy that evening, and so was he."

And her thoughts wandered into a vagueness that was not wholly happy nor wholly sad.

* * * * *

As we noticed, when we went with John Harbuckle to the leads of the White Tower, the great keep, once at the extreme east of a little walled city, now rises in the midst of a gigantic town, which stretches away in every direction, much further than the eye can see on the clearest day.

To the north-east, nearly under the Tower walls, as seen from the leads, is the classical façade of the Royal Mint, with

the tall chimney of Rothschild's gold refinery beside it.

Behind these buildings is still to be found one of the most sunken neighbourhoods in London, although the far-famed Rosemary Lane now belongs to the legendary past, along with the three thousand of the vilest dens ever tenanted by human beings, which have recently been demolished.

The Mission in which Alison Bayliss and John Harbuckle were interested, had for many years been working in this poverty-stricken and degraded place and quietly doing a great deal of good, with very little blowing of trumpets, and with no sensational appeals to the public.

This Mission's Flower Mission was a very popular institution with every one; especially with Alison, who never willingly missed a Saturday during the flower season. It was strange how eagerly poor creatures, in need of the commonest

necessaries of life, looked for the coming of the weekly nosegay; it was touching how the most wretched faces brightened for an instant as they turned to the offered flowers. Did it mean, Alison often asked herself, that there was a very real hunger for beauty in the hearts of these poor human beings? There must have been, or, wanting bread too often, they would not have cherished those flowers so long, nor parted with them, all dead and faded, so grudgingly.

It was towards the schoolroom of this Mission that John Harbuckle and his niece turned on this Saturday afternoon. They soon left Trinity Square and Postern Row, and were then beyond the limits of the City's jurisdiction.

Business in the great commercial world was over for the week. The broad thoroughfare between the Docks and the Tower, at other times so crowded, was almost deserted; the kind Sisters of Mercy,

who had been serving out ha'porths and pen'orths of stodgy pudding to the labourers, had shut up their stall, and were going home. In the front of the foreign hotel, at the end of the Minories, a number of Swedish emigrants were silently waiting, bundles in hand, babies in arm, children beside them, for the signal from the Docks. It was a sight often to be seen there. It always touched Alison; now it roused her out of herself. She crossed the road to the crowd, all so quiet with waiting; they turned their eyes on her English flowers; she moved among them smilingly, giving to each a bright geranium bloom, and a fragrant piece of mignonette. They thanked her many, many times over, in a language she did not understand; but she could read their thanks in their faces, as plainly as they her unspoken "God speed you." They took all her flowers. Hardly had she given away the last one, when the long-expected signal was given, and the

emigrants slowly moved away, never to see her again.

Perhaps in some book, the other side of the world, a little piece of English mignonette may still be found, pressed between the leaves; perhaps in some home, beyond the Atlantic, there may still linger the tradition of the young English lady and her gift.

Alison and her Uncle John watched the retreating emigrants for a moment or two. Alison felt a pang of heartbreak and longing, for there were few things that touched her more than partings—that helped her to throw herself into her work. She and Uncle John walked away from the honest blue home-spun, and turning a corner, were at once in a dingy, squalid neighbourhood, with a close, murky atmosphere, highly charged with the odour of fried fish. Innumerable children were playing about these streets, their shouts mingling with the incessant shrieks from

the engines at a large goods station near at hand. Several of the urchins rushed up to Alison as soon as they saw her, clamouring for promises of flowers.

"Teacher, teacher!" said one little ragged girl, in a very hoarse voice, pulling at Alison's skirt, "the baby died this morning."

"Ah, poor little thing! And you want some flowers for it? Where do you live, child, now?"

"Over there, down in Wheel-barrer Court, teacher," in a rough whisper.

"Very well, I'll see what I can find for you. You wait here until I come out. Well, Mary Skinner?"

"Oh, miss, please my brother's in the 'orspital, and mother's agoing to see him to-morrow; and mother says, please could you let her have some flowers to take him? Miss, there's lots and lots of hampers come to-day; heaps on 'em!"

"That's right; you shall have some.

I'll bring them to you presently." And she went into a large schoolroom. John Harbuckle followed, put down his fragrant burden, and retired.

Fifteen or sixteen ladies had already assembled, and were hard at work. A few minutes later, the hampers—Alec's as well as others—were being carefully unpacked, and at every one of the hard-worn desks, brilliant summer flowers were being deftly made up into little bouquets, each bouquet the bearer of a sacred text, the preparing of which texts had been the winter's work of many an invalid, unable, otherwise, to help the good cause.

That was indeed a fragrant good work! How many kind thoughts, how many earnest prayers went up to heaven, mingled with the breath of the flowers, none can ever know; neither can they know the good effected. The results of such a delicate, tender Mission refuse to submit to crude, mortal tabulation.

"Little Maggie Ruder tells me the baby is dead," said Alison to the presiding lady, who was opening the hampers.

"Poor thing! But one cannot be sorry for it; indeed, I am thankful. They are about our very worst people, aren't they?"

"I am afraid so. But I've had plenty of white flowers to day; might I make a little white wreath, and take it to the house?"

"Make the wreath, by all means; I'm glad you thought of it. But isn't it too dreadful a place for you to go to? The police don't like going there alone."

"But they won't hurt me. I'm not at all afraid, if I may just have the white flowers out of this hamper."

Then, for the first time, she touched the blossoms Alec had sent. She felt that, for that sacred purpose, she *could* touch them. But as she sat forming a wreath, fit to lay on a dead queen, it was all she

could do to keep her tears from falling, so depressed she felt. She could hardly have told why; perhaps it was for Alec, perhaps it was for the dead baby, perhaps nervous reaction. But she often recalled—ah, with what sorrow!—the deep sadness that fell upon her as she made that wreath with the flowers Alec had sent from Muirhead. She was not often sad at the Flower Mission. As a rule, she felt in buoyant spirits there; often, indeed, strangely happy, and chiding herself, now and then, that she should feel so happy, when there was so much degradation and misery in the world.

Presently the wreath was finished; she laid it beside a light heap of nosegays, while she took out some flowers for the girl whose brother was in the hospital, and then returned to fetch it, carrying it away very carefully resting on both her hands.

She left the flower-scented schoolroom

and the busy workers for the crowded, unsavoury streets, and went through the paved yards of the Peabody buildings. Children stopped her every other minute with—

"Oh my! ain't they lovely?"

"Yes, dear; would you like to smell them? They are to put on a poor little dead baby." And Alison would lower her hands and their odorous burden to the children's reach.

They sniffed with satisfaction, but not one of those rough children attempted to touch the sacred white blossoms.

Presently she left the comparative respectability of the Peabody dwellings for a network of court and alleys, each, if possible, more loathsome than the other. At last, guided by the ragged girl beside her, she reached the top of a slum, filled with creatures so hideously squalid and degraded, that even Alison, who was used to the neighbourhood, and the three

thousand demolished dens, paused and looked at them, her grey eyes dilated with pitying sorrow and wonder that girls and women could sink so low.

"Is this where you live, dear?" she asked gently of the ragged child.

The little girl nodded, and pointed to a door half-way down the court.

Alison paused hardly two seconds, but a crowd collected round her immediately, staring sullenly at her, as if she had been one of the strange foreign animals one sees in the wild beast shops of the neighbouring highway.

She was not afraid of them; it never entered her brain to be afraid of them. She bent her hands to one or two of the smaller children, as she had done to the better-clad denizens of the Industrial dwellings, and repeated—

"Would you like to smell these flowers? They are for a little dead baby here."

The grimy elder girls and unkempt

women uttered a muffled chorus of "My!" The small children sniffed at them with delight, but no one put out a sacrilegious finger to deface the pure beauty of the wreath.

"That's the place," said half a dozen voices.

"Thanks," said Alison, moving away. "Good day!"

The crowd gave her no answer, but parted sullenly to let her through, and then turned to look after her. Oh, the stifling, pestiferous air, the utter want of all that makes life decent, the loathsomeness of everything, except Alison and her flowers! She came at last to the door. It stood ajar; the ragged child would have pushed it open.

"We had better tap first; your mother may be busy," said Alison, and tapped gently, very, very conscious of the little dead baby she knew was in that house.

"Mother ain't in; she's——" began the

hoarse-voiced child by her side. But before the sentence was finished, the door was opened—opened gently, and Alison found herself face to face with a young woman, in form and countenance so utterly different from the woman she expected to see, that all her thoughts were scattered into confusion, and she and the other stood looking into each other's faces for a space that was, in reality, infinitesimal, but which, to Alison, when she recalled it, as she was compelled to do, many and many a time afterwards, seemed like a great chasm riven between the days that were, and the time that evermore should be. It was a grand face and form that confronted Alison at the door of that reeking hovel; a face, a form, physically much grander than her own. But there was a droop about the shoulders; and in the set, white face, bordered by the rich tawny hair, and in the large, heavy-lidded eyes, a look of dreary heart-torture, such as had

never come face to face with Alison Bayliss before.

"I have brought a wreath for the poor little baby," said Alison, under her voice, her eyes uplifted to the woman in the doorway.

"Thanks. It is very kind of you to think of it. Will you come in and lay it on the child yourself?"

"She comes from one of the other Missions," thought Alison. But though she said this to herself, she felt that the explanation was insufficient. There was something more than sympathy in the sorrow-dimmed voice.

"The mother is out at work," that voice added. "She had to go as soon as the child was dead. There is little time for mourning here."

"Is she very much grieved?" asked Alison tenderly, glancing up at the set white face in the doorway.

"She should not be," answered the

other emphatically, turning away and crossing the filthy floor of the den, in which, every night, seven human beings slept, to a cupboard, on the top of which lay the dead baby. Other hands than its mother's had washed the little body, and dressed it in a clean white gown; but oh, it was not lovely, that poor little dead fragment of humanity, with its unsmiling mouth, and its tightly closed, deep-sunken eyes!

"Poor wee thing! The dear wee thing!" murmured Alison pityingly, the tears rising and hiding the still form. The baby's little sister, standing on one side of Alison, hardly looked up at the words; she was so absorbed in the wonderful softness that, by stroking, she had found out existed in the fringe of Alison's mantle. The tall young woman with the sad face said nothing.

Alison turned to her, and looking up earnestly, as if for sympathy with the

distress that was moving her own heart, said very gently, "But it is a mercy, isn't it, when these little ones are taken?"

A burning glow, like the furnace heat of intense physical anguish, flew over the white face, and up to the tawny hair. "A mercy! My God, what a mercy! *It was a GIRL!*" escaped her, as if wrung from her heart by the intolerable strain of the mental rack she was on.

Alison felt she had touched another of the great tragedies of life; she turned to the dead child again. A moment later, she knew her companion had vanished, and that she was alone with the dead babe and its ragged sister. She arranged the wreath around the little head; she placed a few daisies in the tight-clenched waxen hand, the ragged child looking on with wonder, but always turning again to feel the softness of the silken fringe.

Alison spoke to the little thing kindly, told her of the baby sister safe and happy

with God and Jesus Christ and the angels. The child listened, but still her lean and grimy hand sought the softness of the fringe.

"You seem to have taken a fancy to my fringe," said Alison, presently.

The small dismal face brightened; the child hung her head quite shyly. And shyness was very little known in that neighbourhood.

"If I were to pull out one of these little pieces and give it you?" suggested Alison, smiling.

The child looked up, her grubby face radiant with wonder and delight.

Alison carefully drew out one soft, long, curling piece of fringe, and gave it to the little girl. It was too much happiness; the child could not speak her thanks, but her eyes twinkled with delight as she knew her treasure her own, as her hand closed over that new wonder of silken softness. Think of this, you who are so richly

endowed, you who have so many thousands of silken curls on your garment's fringe!

Alison felt much inclined to cry as she left that fetid den; but her little guide shuffled along by her side, and talked freely now, so happy was she.

"Who is that lady?" Alison asked, as they left the court. "Was it she who washed and dressed the poor baby?"

"Yes; she give me a bun onest," said the child.

"She looks very kind," said Alison. "Does she live near here?"

"Dunno! She come to see mother when the baby was ill. She give mother a shilling when father was out of work, she did."

"Is your father out of work now?"

"No," said the child, with another admiring look at the silken curl, and then with a smile of real childish delight and gratitude at Alison.

"Don't you know what the lady's name is?" asked Alison.

"We calls her 'the lady;' we never calls her nothink else."

Presently Alison met some of her fellow Mission-workers, going from house to house and room to room with their bouquets, and she joined them. She spoke to many people she knew; she saw life in many phases before she returned home; but the one face that haunted her, that she could not escape from, was the one that had confronted her in the doorway of the loathsome room that had exhaled the fetid "poor smell" still clinging to her own garments—the face of the woman she had seen tending the dead baby. Who was she, that woman with the physique that once must have been so liberally grand—that woman with torture in her face and voice—her rural face and voice? From what sweet country place had she come, to the foul slums of the great City?

When all the flowers had been distributed and Alison was walking homeward with one of her fellow-workers, who had been there for many years and who was much older than she, Alison related the details of her visit, and spoke of that sorrowful white face, and the rich, warm hair; wondering the while what the tragedy of that woman's life might be, and what the meaning of those footsteps that had slunk away with such stealthy mournfulness, and of that burning flush as she said so bitterly, "*That was a GIRL!*"

Alison always hoped the best she could of every one. She was full of that charity that "thinketh no evil;" but even she could not help reading the anguish of shame, as well as grief and indignation, in the strange manner of the woman she had come upon in that horrible den, and who had seemed to her, at first, so grand a

ministering angel. But ministering angels do not generally slink away with burning cheeks when a sister angel finds them at their gentle work.

"Have you ever met her?" Alison asked her friend.

"Several times; but she always disappears at once."

"Does she belong to one of the Missions?"

"I should think not. She is a working woman I believe; yet she seems rather above such a position. I have heard she has been crossed in love, or something of the kind. I don't know,"—hesitating—"but I have sometimes fancied she is not quite right in her mind. I have found her helping the most repulsive cases. She never shrinks from any horror, although she shrinks from us, and will not let us make friends with her. I have tried several times, but she always shrinks from

us. I am sure she has a history, and a sad one too, poor thing!"

"I hope I shall come across her again," said Alison thoughtfully.

END OF VOL. I.

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